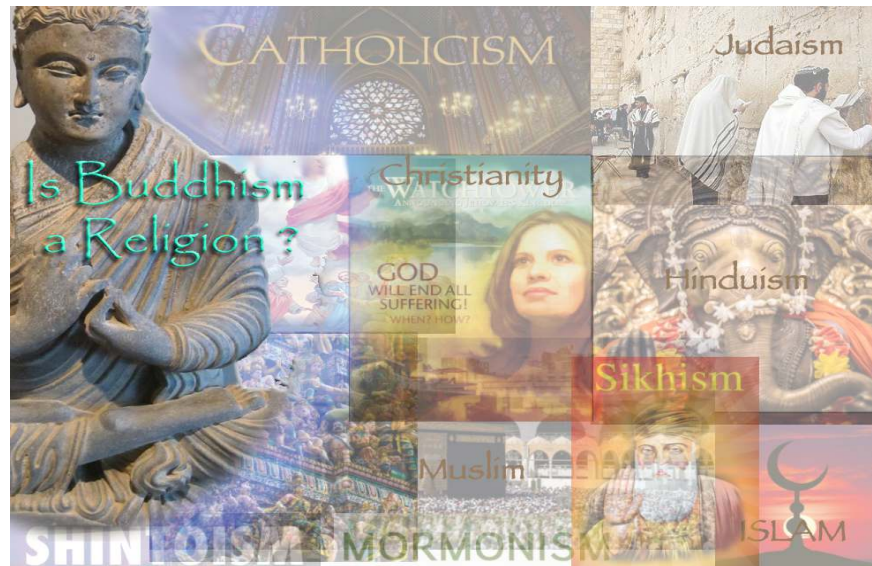


## Is Buddhism a Religion? Why it Matters.



*"The dhamma that I teach can be understood only by those who know how to think."*

*~The Buddha~*

*"Buddhism has no room for intellectual sissies. It offers no salvation by faith; only by fearless, realistic reasoning and effort."*

*~Ven. Sanathavibari~*

### Preface

To say that the topic of whether the teachings of the Buddha constitute what the World considers to be religion, is a hotly debated one, but it shouldn't be. Over the course of my sixty-seven years, many early years of which were spent in the ardent participation and study of Judeo-Christian based religions, I have come to appreciate the differences between what the Buddha actually taught, what is called Buddhism, and the worldview perceptual consensus of what constitutes a religion. This paper seeks to reveal that the actual teachings of the Buddha are the very antithesis of the worldview concept of religion. To pair Buddhism with religion is anathema.

People who claim that Buddhism is a religion, include Western monks, nuns, laypersons, and the general public. Categorization of the teachings of the Buddha, placing them into the "religion" box, is merely a conceptual creation. Absent of correct knowledge, the foundation of this concept is what the Buddha referred to as *paramparaya* (traditions).

This paper examines whether or not the claim that Buddha's teachings and Buddhism is in fact a "religion." Rather than use the word "Buddhism," a word that the World equates with "religion," supposedly created by the historical Buddha, I use the word *Buddha-ism*, as I believe this word reflects the difference between what the Buddha actually taught and what humans have created. In this paper, great care is taken to present explanations that are based on existing comparative data; data that doesn't rest on dogmatic religious traditionalism.

A comparative study of the Buddha's teachings from an etymological, philological, epistemological, linguistic, and pragmatic approach reveals that: Of the various types of philosophical methodologies created by humankind, it is only the linguistic, epistemological and perhaps pragmatic philosophies that appear to reflect the concepts of what it was the Buddha actually taught. Religion or not religion: This paper examines why some so-called Buddhist lay persons, monks, nuns, non-sectarians, and secularists should righteously defend any position at all.

## The Religion Pigeonhole

It is understandable why people from Western cultures consider Buddhism to be a religion. Even ordained monks in the West are influenced by a kind of political oriented mind with regard to how they view Buddha-ism. I believe this is due in part to the customary practices of the various so-called Buddha-ism schools that developed after the death of the Buddha. This perception is obtained because of people's exposure to specific cultural practices of certain schools that purportedly represent the Buddha's teachings, but practices of which the Buddha did not teach. To many in the West, the ceremonies and cultural practices of the Mahayana schools seem similar to those practiced by the various Judeo-Christian religions.

Western Buddhists would do well to drop their attachments to political and social-norm philosophies, which the Buddha himself avoided, evidence of which is absent in the subject matter of the things he taught. I do wonder whether or not this attachment is not simply a methodological pretension for the purpose of inclusion into the larger economic "religion" marketing machine.

While on one hand, inclusion may appear to offer competitive economic benefits in the salvation market, inclusion comes at the cost of misrepresentation of the actual purpose of the Buddha's teachings. The purpose of his teachings was specifically aimed at providing a human with a course in self-healing, without the fetters and yokes of concepts like religion? Removal beyond the fetters of the conceptual and conventional labels like "religion," begins with renouncing any value, importance or attachment to them, dwelling instead in a mental equilibrium of imperturbableness and equanimity.

Attaching or equating Buddha-ism with religion seems to me to be a kind of politically-based ideation, which takes advantage of the status-quo of a society, but that in the end only inhibits inquiry into the actual teachings of the Buddha, thus restricting their beneficial effects.

## Unity of Diversity or a Problem of Consensus?

Practically every dictionary on the planet defines religion theistically. If there is one that does not, I am not aware of it. Even if **most** dictionaries define religion theistically, is there not a reason for this? Dictionaries, add, remove, and change definitions of words all the time, because a consensus of meaning is set by common usage among people<sup>1</sup>. Over time such a consensus developed grounded on usage and social agreement that "religion" is based on the belief in a God.

Some people, even so-called Buddhists, believe that on some level the teachings of the Buddha are equivalent with the teachings of World religions. Yes, similarities do exist, but it is my experience that these similarities are based on common human norms, such as good and bad behavior, bad intent and good intent, certain ideals of perfection, and so on.

Consensus and social norm are nearly synonymous. Social norms are born from consensus<sup>2</sup>. Consensus means that people agree to share the same beliefs, values and ideas. This creates a social expectation. Conformity to consensus is treated as a good thing, becoming an integral part of the social personality. Consensus binds societies together creating social regularities leading to stability, even when the belief behind the consensus has negative social impact. This is explained by C. Wright Mills as "social imagination" and "social equilibrium."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "How does a word get into a Merriam-Webster dictionary?" Merriam-Webster: Src: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/help/faq-words-into-dictionary>

<sup>2</sup> Social Norms: Src: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/social-norms/>

<sup>3</sup> The Social Imagination: C. Wright Mills, 1959, Oxford University Press, pp. 31-45.

At present, the social consensus is that religion is viewed negatively. To prove that this is the case, simply enter the phrase; “Is religion viewed negatively?” into any search engine. The results produced are overwhelmingly negative.<sup>4</sup> In an article titled: “*Five Ways Christianity Is Increasingly Viewed as Extremist*,” author David Kinnaman, examines society’s current perceptions of faith and Christianity. In his article, Kinnaman states:

*“There are intensifying perceptions that faith is at the root of a vast number of societal ills. Though it remains the nation’s most dominant religion, Christianity faces significant headwind in the court of public opinion. The decades-old trend that Christianity is irrelevant is increasingly giving way to the notion that Christianity is bad for society. When calculated on the basis of the entire population, these perceptions represent significant numbers of adults who indicate anxiety about these kinds of religious expression. These factors include reading sacred literature (either the Bible or Koran) as well as donating money to or attending a religious institution. Three-quarters of all Americans—and nine out of ten Americans with no faith affiliation—agree with this statement.”<sup>5</sup>*

Is it then perhaps a sign that society is coming around to the same perception of “religion” that was espoused by Karl Marx?

*“Religion may try to provide heart, but it fails. For Marx, the problem lies in the obvious fact that an opiate drug fails to fix a physical injury — it merely helps you forget pain and suffering. Relief from pain may be fine up to a point, but only as long as you are also trying to solve the underlying problems causing the pain. Similarly, religion does not fix the underlying causes of people’s pain and suffering — instead, it helps them forget why they are suffering and gets them to look forward to an imaginary future when the pain ceases.”<sup>6</sup>*

While all theistic religions make the claim that the purpose of religion is to worship goodness, to thwart evil, and teach people to act with equability, the historical record reveals that religion has failed miserably. Since the time of the first religious war in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE (Cirraean War<sup>7</sup>), up to this very day, religion has proven to be utterly inept at positively influencing the behavior of humankind. The formula simply does not work to solve the problems of human existence. Why? There is no common communication available between different “faiths.”

My own micro survey of randomly selected people, asking what their perception of religion was, and why; all respondents answered negatively. When I asked if they had ever attended any religious services in their life, many said that they had, but abandoned the practice years ago. When I asked them to describe their experience of attending religious services, most respondents described the experience in terms of entertainment; music, singing, eating, and having a good time. None mentioned whether or not they had learned anything about how to solve the problems of human existence; suffering, distress, sickness, or death. When I asked whether or not they thought religion could solve these problems, all responded that they didn’t think religion was the answer.

Proof that religion “...does not fix the underlying problems that cause pain and suffering...” is an irrefutable fact that has grown throughout the ages, and is now the consensus of the majority. Is this social consensus one in which a Buddhist should align with? Since the perception of “religion” is so tainted, for what reason would a Buddhist claim inclusion with such a consensus?

<sup>4</sup> Is Religion Viewed Negatively? Src: <https://duckduckgo.com/?q=is+religion+viewed+negatively&t=ffab&ia=web>

<sup>5</sup> Christianity Increasingly Viewed as Extremist” Src: <https://www.barna.com/research/five-ways-christianity-is-increasingly-viewed-as-extremist/>

<sup>6</sup> Cline, Austin. “Karl Marx on Religion as the Opium of the People.” Learn Religions, Sep. 10, 2021, [learnreligions.com/karl-marx-on-religion-251019](https://learnreligions.com/karl-marx-on-religion-251019).

<sup>7</sup> Cirraean War (First [Recorded] Sacred War): Src: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First\\_Sacred\\_War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Sacred_War)

### Semantics or Not?

I believe that while the ancient concept of the word religion, which comes down to us from the ancient Latin word *religare* (rell-ih-gar-ay), meant a “binding together;” may have, at one time, been applicable to the practices of those who followed the Buddha’s teachings. However, attaching to the modern connotative, perceptual, and inferential meaning attributed to the word “religion,” onto the practices of those who follow the Buddha, has become anathema.

Anyone, with even a little social intelligence, and knowledge of history, would hesitate to meld this perception; this consensus, and these inferences of “religion,” into what the Buddha taught. This hesitation should also be taken seriously when levying such characteristics onto the practices of his followers.

The current perception of what “religion” represents is simply incompatible with the teachings of the Buddha. Furthermore, the Buddha did not teach that his followers were under obligation to respect something that was clearly incorrect for the sake of being politically acceptable, or because of consensus, at least not to my knowledge. This incompatibility is addressed by the chasm of doctrinal differences found in the World’s religions, but extends to the differences in purpose; particularly since the current consensus regarding the efficacy of “religion” in our modern age is so negative. Inferring that Buddha-*ism* is anything reminiscent of “religion,” represents pigeonholing the teachings of the Buddha based solely on various cultural norms, traditions, and political-correctness.

Given the history of “religion” and what the word implies, isn’t the time ripe that the teachings of the Buddha be placed where they belong; into a unique category, absent the negative patina of religion?

I am not so delusional to think that this might happen; it is doubtful, particularly in light of the power and far-reaching arms of conceptually based consensus and opinion in our modern world.

Recently, a monk friend of mine sent me a book titled: “**Life Examined: Lessons in Buddhist Philosophy**,<sup>8</sup>” written by a knowledgeable wise monk, and teacher, Madawela Punnañi Thera<sup>9</sup>, who passed away in 2018. After reading the book several times, outlining it, highlighting it, contemplating its content, and reflecting on Bhante Punnañi’s point of view, I can state that I agree with a lot of what he wrote, but not everything. There was one particular section that appears on page 207 that caused me some concern. In this section, Bhante Punnañi stated that:

“...a common practice is observable in all religions, which can be broken down into four levels of practice.

1. **Devotion**-worship of goodness, prayer, sacrifices, and rituals.
2. **Discipline**-practice of precepts or obeying commandments.
3. **Purification of Mind**-meditation and contemplation.
4. **Realization of Truth**-getting in touch with the Ultimate Reality.”

I feel that I am uniquely qualified to address the fact that while all religions may have similar doctrines and dogma, this does not mean these are practiced. I have directly experienced higher “theistic” education myself, in a plethora of Christian belief systems, from Roman Catholic seminaries to Jehovah’s Witnesses, Baptist, Episcopalian, Assembly of God, and everything in between. I can honestly say that most theists would have no clue of what Bhante Punnañi is talking about in most of the aforementioned list.

<sup>8</sup> **Life Examined: Lessons in Buddhist Philosophy**: 2022, Punnañi, Madawela, Src: <https://www.amazon.ca/Life-Examined-Lessons-Buddhist-Philosophy/dp/0968908330>

<sup>9</sup> **Madawela Punnañi Thera**: [https://www.dhammadownload.com/index.php/Madawela\\_Punnañi](https://www.dhammadownload.com/index.php/Madawela_Punnañi)

Theists would easily understand the concepts of devotion, worship, and obeying commandments, but would be completely in the dark about subjects such as purification of mind, meditation, and especially getting in touch with Ultimate Reality, particularly from a standpoint, meaning and viewpoint of Bhante Punaji. While theist-based religions may espouse some form of these things, I can say with confidence, that none of what is taught in the theist-based religions focuses on the “Ultimate Reality” to which Bhante Punaji is referring. Few theist-based religions place any emphasis on human experience other than perhaps the mysticism surrounding external phenomena, such as prayer, heaven and hell.

If all of what is included in Bhante Punaji’s list is “observable” in all religions, why is it then that the theist-based religions are so ineffectual? Why then is it so observable that the theist-based religions cause such separation among human beings and societies? Also, if these commonalities are observable, how are they observable? What are the indicators that these things are observable? If the theist-based religions were effective, why then is it **observable** that the results of theist doctrines, although being the same as Buddhism, as Bhante Punaji suggests, obviously results with a different outcome when actually practicing the teachings of the Buddha?

I have the utmost respect for monks like Bhante Punaji, who have devoted years of practice to the teachings of the Buddha. However, I have to wonder from where did he obtain his knowledge or concepts of religious practice and theist doctrine? Bhante Punaji was born in Sri Lanka in 1929. After earning a medical degree, he was ordained a Buddhist monk in 1968. Although Bhante Punaji was highly educated, there is no indication that he ever officially studied the Catechism nor attended any Catholic or Protestant seminary for the purpose of becoming a priest or pastor. Nor, I imagine, was he ever intimately involved with “regular worship” services in any of the theistic-based World religions.

Therefore, do not his references of theist-based doctrine, usher from a purely intellectual standpoint? While his knowledge of doctrine, which he states is common between Buddhism and the World’s religions, are conventionally true from a philosophic and intellectual point of view, his knowledge does not come from a position of direct personal experience. Intellectual knowledge alone, without direct personal experience, limits the scope of one’s viewpoint and understanding.

### Talk the talk and walk the walk

The old maxim: “If one talks the talk, they should walk the walk,” applies to the World’s religions. Although theist-based religions talk the talk, there is little evidence that the result of the talk is of any real value toward solving the problems of human existence.

If what is said and believed is not practiced; if the results reveal little evidence of good; if there is no real visible efficacy toward goodness, can the theist-based religions be true or real? What is actually observed? If there is nothing individually or evidentially resulting in observable production of good; devoid of direct personal experience that addresses the problem of human existence, can there actually be a similarity between the theist-based religions and the teachings of the Buddha?

Conversely, if there is no observable positive personal experience stemming from the practice of Buddha-ism; nothing to prove that the practical application of the Buddha’s teachings has any experiential efficacy to bring clarity of purpose or meaning to a person’s life, then these questions are also applicable to Buddha-ism.

You would think there would be an overall observable positive consensus stemming from what the World’s religions purportedly stand for. There simply is not. The desire to satisfy a utilitarian purpose of inclusion of Buddha-ism with these so-called observable theistic-based religious practices, is incorrect, and ineffectual for promoting and preserving the truth of the Dhamma.



**Gallup Religion Poll 2021**

At the present time, do you think religion as a whole is increasing its influence on American life or losing its influence?

	Increasing its influence	Losing its influence	Same (vol.)
	%	%	%
2021	21	78	1
2020	33	64	2

### Experience is Truth

My experience with the teachings of the Buddha have taught me that he was correct: Truth can only be found in experience. If this is not true, what is the alternative? Of all the experiences I had with the various theistic-based religions I was involved with for some 40+ years, I feel confident in saying that none of them led me to the knowledge and understanding of the conditions, causes and effects regarding the problems of my own existence.

My experiences with theist-based religions were, frankly, just the opposite. Regardless of the depth and level of my Biblical studies; no matter the intensity of my devotion, prayer, and faith, none of them produced the experience of clarity or understanding that I have achieved through practicing the Four Noble Truths.

My overall experiences only produced confusion, ultimately leaving me with more unanswered questions. My questions were common ones, no different than those of any other human being, even of the Buddha. *To wit:* Why do human beings have to die? Why is life so peppered with stress, sickness and anxiety? My religion-based experiences revealed one truth: Theist-based religions did not, and could not, provide any explanations applicable to solving the problems of human existence.

### Good is Good, Bad is Bad

Recorded in the Anguttara Nikaya (2.34), the Buddha defines good and bad, speaking of experience as the only truth. If something is good, it is good. If something is bad, it is bad. Buddha never said that something was near-to good or near-to bad. Something is either bad or it is good. There is no “in-between.”

The determining factor, according to the Buddha’s testimony, is found in the Anguttara Nikaya:

*“I teach doing and not doing. Doing what is good and not doing what is bad. Whatever leads to happiness is good, and whatever leads to unhappiness is bad.”*

When asked whether or not he agreed with wise people in the World regarding what is good and what is bad, Buddha replied:

*“Yes. Whatever the wise people regard as good, I also regard as good. What the wise people regard as bad, I also agree.”*

Factually, the percentage of people who have a negative perceptual consensus that religion is useless, ineffective, and bad, is overwhelmingly the majority. Now, wouldn’t this group not constitute those whom the Buddha refers to as “wise people?” Doesn’t their understanding stem from experience? Was the Buddha referring only to educated people? Buddha taught the concepts of metta (maitree), which means that there is no distinction between ourselves and others, then surely, he was not referring to only a select few of highly educated people.

A 2021 Gallup Poll (*pictured above*), shows that 82% of U.S. adults agree that religion is losing its influence, up from 58% in April 2020. In the 1950s & 1960s, consensus was that religion was gaining influence on American life, which has sunk to a historical record of just 16%. The consensus is that religious influence has been on the decline for almost as long as Gallup has been conducting the poll, which is nearly 60 years<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Gallup Religion Poll: Src: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1690/religion.aspx>

This recent poll doesn't state that certain religions were targeted, rather it points out that respondents were people from a general selection of the US population. According to this 2021 Gallup Poll, there is a definable, statistically observable consensus among Americans that "all" religion is not as valuable or effective as it was once considered to be. It is clear from the numbers that "religion" in the US, in general, is most definitely not perceived positively.

Now, there has to be a viable reason for this. That reason, I suggest, is because religion, as it is understood, represented and taught, misses the mark of offering or providing any solutions for the problems of human existence. So then, considering this negative consensus, why would anyone want to jump on that band wagon, let alone a Buddhist? Buddha's teachings simply do not represent the same things that the World's religions do. Why would anyone want to put Buddha in the same religion box? Associating the superior teachings of the Buddha with the concept, consensus and perception of failing World religions is, as I said, anathema.

Perhaps, with regards to my own belief, if I believe that I am right about this and the world is all wrong, then in this particular regard, I am in fact deluded indeed. But, don't the facts speak quite loudly for themselves? In retrospect, I question if perhaps those who insist that *Buddhism* is religion are suffering from a similar delusion. They are right and the World is all wrong. Then, hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of people in the polls and studies are also wrong about religion. But, this is not the case. Religion is viewed negatively because the experiences of people over the decades has proven to them that the doctrines, commandments and ethics, among other characteristics, simply have no value and do not work.

### Consequences and Ethics

The two significant sources of the Buddha's teachings outlining his position on the consequences of actions (*vipaka vada*) are found in the Majjhima Nikaya 14 and 101. In these suttas, the Buddha places the emphasis of his teaching on the goodness or badness of an action.

Ethics, in the form of goodness, is an important thread that is evident throughout the Buddha's teachings. This focus is the reverse of theist-based religions, whereby the emphasis is on the consequences or punishment if one does not comply with the rules. For the Buddha, it was all about the actions that cause harm.

Although the Christian doctrine: "*Do unto others as you would have others do unto you*,"<sup>11</sup> is a well-known Christian tenet, it is one that does not appear to have much influence on the actions of the members of theist-based religions. The record shows that they separate themselves from others in the world with the belief evidenced in their behavior: "Our faith is the right one, all others will suffer the consequences of an eternity in hell."

My personal direct experience with the Judeo-Christian based religions was basically: "It is God's way or the highway." There was little to no teaching that focused on the individual's problems of existence. This is completely opposite of the core of the Buddha's teachings. Buddha taught the opposite of judgmental and separatist thinking. You would think that with so much at stake, people would want to rely on proof of efficacy rather than on faith, which can only offer hope, which is another word for wishful thinking.

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<sup>11</sup> Mathew 7:12 - New American Standard Bible: "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets." Src: [https://biblehub.com/nasb/\\_matthew/7.htm](https://biblehub.com/nasb/_matthew/7.htm)

Theistic religions all make the claim that their particular flavor of religious philosophy is the right one. Such attachment is called “dogma.”<sup>12</sup> While it is conventionally true that the foundational teachings of various religious doctrines are love, peace, compassion, and so on; centuries of abysmal behavior, such as bloodshed, deception, violence against women, religious wars, separation of people and societies, not to mention the damage done to scientific discovery, obviously do not support the doctrines of which they espouse.

One important aspect of the Buddha’s teachings clearly separates it from the World’s religions, which is that no other system provides a real-time solution to the problem of human existence. Buddha wasn’t concerned with the consequences of one’s actions as much as he was with the intention involved behind the action. Do not centuries of compassionate non-violent peaceful living, reveal that the Buddha’s methods are by far, more effective, and true, with respect to providing a solution for the problems of human existence?

### **Wearing the Religion Label: Is There Any Benefit to be Had?**

Parents counsel their children not to associate with children known to behave badly. Parents want to protect their children. How do parents determine that certain children are bad? Those children have exhibited bad behavior, bad habits and bad reputations. If their child should be in the company of such children with bad reputations, what would prevent others, perhaps law enforcement officers, from holding an innocent child responsible for the actions of the bad children? Nothing. Guilty by association. If a person is innocent of some illegal activity, but is found in the company of those who committed the illegal acts, how is that fact of innocence to be known? The facts create an assumption. Guilty by association.

We saw this kind of culpability transference in the Muslim community post 2001, with the aftermath of the attacks on the US by certain radical adherents to the Muslim faith. All Muslims became suspect by association of their religion, and had to endure much bigotry and discrimination. Guilt by association.

In the Sigolovada Sutta (9)<sup>13</sup>, the Buddha highlighted the importance of being aware of one’s associations.

*“These are the six dangers inherent in roaming the streets at inappropriate times: oneself, one’s family, and one’s property are all left unguarded and unprotected; one is suspected of crimes; then rumors spread; and one is subjected to many miseries. These are the six dangers inherent in bad companionship: any rogue, drunkard, addict, cheat, swindler, or thug becomes a friend and colleague. Upon these things the wise reflect; they obtain greatness, and are sources of praise.”*

Again, considering that the overwhelming consensus of religion is negative, of what benefit is it then to associate Buddha-ism with this perception?” Is this not counterproductive to the preservation of truth, unnecessarily casting a shadow over the teachings of the Buddha? I believe that labeling Buddha-ism as a religion, casts unwarranted unavoidable aspersions onto the teachings of the Buddha, and utterly marginalizes the actual teachings he spoke.

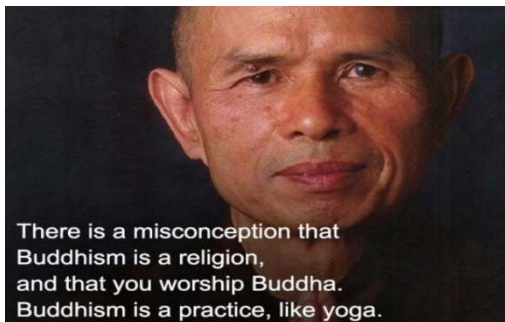
I find that I must agree with Sam Harris in this respect. It would be best if the followers of the Buddha’s teachings simply dropped the idea of “Buddhism” altogether. The negative perceptual references associated with what “religion” represents is simply not good, beneficial or productive, and in essence leaves the house of the Dhamma unprotected.

<sup>12</sup> Dogma: Definition Src: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dogma>

<sup>13</sup> Sigolovada Sutta (v. 9): Src: <https://accesstosight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.31.0.ksw0.html>



Of late there appears to be a flurry of armchair philosophers claiming that the teachings of the Buddha, and in fact, the Buddha himself, constitute all of the same elements of the World's religions, and so therefore, is a religion. There is one important factor missing from most, if not all of these claims...the claimants have very little, if any, direct practical experience with the very "religions" they claim to be like Buddhism. The effect, of practicing Buddha's teachings results in the development of introspection and a turning of attention inward (*satipatthana*<sup>14</sup>), which increases one's ability to correctly interpret circumstances.



Thich Nhat Hanh on "Is Buddhism a Religion"

Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh says:

*"Buddhism is not a religion, it's a practice, similarly to yoga, which you can do irrespective of religious beliefs. It's a practice, a practice to awaken to how we deceive ourselves and learn how to self-correct. I call it a wisdom tradition."*

Bhikkhu Bodhi, an active monk in the Theravada tradition and prolific author on Buddhism, writes in his foreword to Acharya Buddhārakkhita's translation of the Dhammapada, the most widely known text from the Pali canon (suttas):

*"To his followers, the Buddha is neither a god, a divine incarnation, or a prophet bearing a message of divine revelation, but a human being who by his own striving and intelligence has reached the highest spiritual attainment of which man is capable — perfect wisdom, full enlightenment, complete purification of mind."*

A central discourse in the Pali canon is the *Kālāma sutta*, often referred to by Theravada and Mahayana practitioners as Buddha's "*charter of free inquiry*." Theravada monk Soma Thera says about the *Kālāma sutta*:

*"The instruction of the Kalamas (Kalama Sutta) is justly famous for its encouragement of free inquiry; the spirit of the sutta signifies a teaching that is exempt from fanaticism, bigotry, dogmatism, and intolerance."*<sup>15</sup>

When this presumed association between religion and Buddhism is scrutinized, it is not difficult to see that most of what constitutes the foundation of these arguments involves hair-splitting; selectively picking apart the teachings of the Buddha in order to find anything that is closest-to or similar-to the doctrines of the World's religions. However, searching through the entire corpus of the Buddha's teachings, it is difficult, to say the least, to find anything close to or similar to this worldview.

One might successfully be able to point to certain labels, concepts or English words that the Buddha said, which appear to mirror certain doctrines of the World's religions, but the reality of what the Buddha taught can only come from one's own direct experience. All of the teachings of the Buddha are merely concepts until direct personal experience causes them to become real. Underneath the concepts taught by the Buddha lie an entire new reality; an entirely different clarity; a new understanding of one's own life. This simply does not exist in the theistic religions of the world.

<sup>14</sup> **Satipatthana**; (Meaning) Src: <https://puredhamma.net/sutta-interpretations/maha-satipatthana-sutta/satipatthana-introduction/>

<sup>15</sup> **Is Buddhism a Religion**: Article Src: <https://fredriklyhagen.medium.com/is-buddhism-a-religion-eeafa59c95f0>



Michel Foucault

In comparing the teachings of the Buddha to the worldview of religion, I believe the position taken should be Foucauldian<sup>16</sup>, which means examining the core of the entire evolutionary body of

religious ideas and concepts before making any definitive assessment of what it is that constitutes a religion, and how such relates to the standard worldview. However, such an in-depth study is not necessary.

*"It is not that religion is delusional by nature, nor that the individual, beyond present-day religion, rediscovers his most suspect psychological origins. But religious delusion is a function of the secularization of culture: religion may be the object of delusional belief insofar as the culture of a group no longer permits the assimilation of religious or mystical beliefs in the present context of experience."* -Michel Foucault [1962]<sup>17</sup>

A full examination, in the same manner in which Foucault studied world religious views, allows for a series of critical interventions that question the conditioned roots and evolution of religion as a concept. Foucault's examination encompasses all of the dependencies and alliances with religion, including, but not limited to, medicine and church; examination of the politics of mystery in religious literature, and scrutiny of the power of religious revolts, uncovering the disciplinary regimes of its institutions, and exposing the technological practices which shape the Western ethics of religion.

Beliefs are the things that organize human behavior. If the overwhelming consensus is that "religion" is ineffective against suffering and unhappiness, then this belief has a hand in structuring our World.

*"Beliefs are a representation of the world. Clearly, they are mental representations of the world. But, they're not only that. A belief is a representation of the world which is taken to actually represent the world, which is to say that it is taken to be true."*<sup>18</sup>

### Noticeable Linguistic Trends

A noticeable trend in the decay of language is evident in the modern world; a decay which the world seems to have firmly grasped. This decay focuses on reducing concepts, ideas, and objects to the smallest meaning or definition possible, the purpose of which is to save time in order to fulfill societies never-ending quest for speed.

Overwhelming evidence of this is the increase use of emojis and other graphical representations to replace language, convey concepts, ideas, and particularly emotion<sup>19</sup>. Furthermore, and growing unabated, technology reduces the experiences of life to short-bursts of soundbites, rewording, redefining, narrowing, and rendering words impotent of their broader meanings.

Semantic changes are evident in the modern-day meaning of the words "love," "awesome," "gay," "bad," "like," "nice," "literally," and "religion."<sup>20</sup> In this modern-age of haste; the trend of doing, rather than being<sup>21</sup>, is pandemic<sup>22</sup>; and reduces descriptive language of life's experiences into small emoji-like capsules<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Foucauldian: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Foucauldian>

<sup>17</sup> Religion and Culture, Foucault, Michel, Src: <https://archive.org/details/MichelFoucaultReligionAndCulture1999Routledge/mode/1up>

<sup>18</sup> Quote: Sam Harris, 2016 Lecture given at the University of California at Irvine. Src: <https://youtu.be/sQuDWt9qmBs>

<sup>19</sup> Decay of English Language: <https://www.intellectualtakeout.org/blog/decay-our-language-happening/> | <https://news.usc.edu/trojan-family/why-language-changes-evolution-of-speech/> | <https://www.bbvaopenmind.com/en/technology/digital-world/emoji-the-new-global-language/>

<sup>20</sup> Semantic Changes in Present-Day English: Src: [https://dclu.langston.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1022&context=mccabe\\_theses](https://dclu.langston.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1022&context=mccabe_theses)

<sup>21</sup> Difference Between Being and Doing: <https://www.mindful.org/difference-between-being-and-doing/>

<sup>22</sup> Being Rather than Doing: <https://www.brisbanecitypsychologist.com.au/how-being-rather-than-doing-can-change-your-life/>

<sup>23</sup> Is Time Speeding Up? Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/future-trends/201808/is-time-speeding>

What of the timbre of the human voice, that allows us to make determinations of intent? Is this no longer relevant? Humankind's desire for speed, and quantity over quality, has caused a kind of abandonment of the necessity to contemplate the corporeal life we all have<sup>24</sup>, but are losing the ability to know how to express it.

Always, doing-doing-doing, ever more caught up in modern technology, and the maintenance of that technology, leaves many with an empty and unfulfilled feeling. In order to fill this void, the modern world seems to know no other resolve than to pile on more stuff; creating language short-cuts; keeping the eyes moving and the brain occupied, to the degree that when a moment of inactivity actually does occur, a discomfort sets in; and an odd sensation of being empty; feeling peculiar; until in the end one surrenders to utter boredom.

Sound familiar? Fewer people take the time to develop habits such as reading, meditating, contemplative creative or reflective activities, the emotional results of experience are little more than feelings of emptiness, jitteriness, and boredom. The need for extended knowledge, for observation, and scrutiny of one's inner world, is abandoned for the sake of satisfying our outward desire for accumulations, thus strengthening our attachments to the material world.

The ever-increasing haste of our society, drives the demand for more things in order to keep our brains and senses occupied. However, learning how to live a meaningful happy life cannot be explained by Cliff notes or texted in cell phone acronyms or emojis. This mindset appears to be affecting the World's religions, who have not been able to adjust to the need for solutions to the problems of human existence.

## Boxing in the Buddha

But, aren't these semantic and linguistic changes good, and natural? It's easier to categorize things without having to know much about them? That's logical isn't it? This is what has happened with regard to the teachings of the Buddha. It is simply easier; requires less analytical thought, requires little responsibility to simply lump the teachings of the Buddha into the same pigeonhole with the world concept of 'religion.' Buddha's teachings take time to absorb and understand, and require diligent active practice, which can't be reduced to a singular systemized conceptual label. There is no shortcut.

This ever burgeoning need to satisfy the senses, ignores our inner world. We bask in and are absorbed by satisfying our minds with images flashing before our eyes; over-activating our brains with continuous input from without; habitually becoming accustomed to this never-ending stream of input, rendering useless any notion that there is in fact a limitless universe that exists within us. And, it is from these efforts that develops the need to categorize and compartmentalize everything.

Herein lies the foundation of the armchair Buddhist philosopher who seeks to reduce the teachings of the Buddha for the purposes, not of explaining the experiences gained through the teachings or promoting them as a solution for the problems of human existence, but for dogmatic advancement of the concept that the Buddha's teachings constitute a "religion."

One is naturally led to wonder what it is that is at stake? Why does any of this matter? What is gained by insisting that Buddha-*ism* is a religion? What is at stake if Buddha-*ism* is **not** a religion? Does it matter in the end? Perhaps what is at stake is a position they have made for themselves.

<sup>24</sup> **Fast-Paced-World: How Can We Keep Up:** <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-power-slow/200911/how-can-we-keep-in-fast-paced-world>

Perhaps there is a perceived threat to their self-aggrandized viewpoint; their self-important inflated intellectual ego. Are these things not evident by their efforts to defend their claims with the righteous determination and indignation of a Medieval Crusader, for the sake of status quo or some basis for secularization?

Perhaps, it is nothing more than the desire to be different, grasping at individuality. However, such positions do not find its foundation in the teachings of the Buddha nor, upon examination, do their positional arguments hold up under scrutiny. Additionally, claimants to the idea that Buddha's teachings are "religion," in the strictest sense of the worldview definition, do so with finger-pointing bias. Their findings center around biases that stem from uninformed, unknowledgeable reasoning (*takka*<sup>25</sup>/*naya*<sup>26</sup>).

Buddha called such delusions *moha*.<sup>27</sup> A follower of the Buddha, at least one who has practical knowledge and experience, sees these biases for what they are, mere philosophical psychobabble. They are quick to criticize someone who counters their "religion" claim, stating that such counter criticism is caused by a deep-seated desire to 'escape' the confines of one's childhood religion.

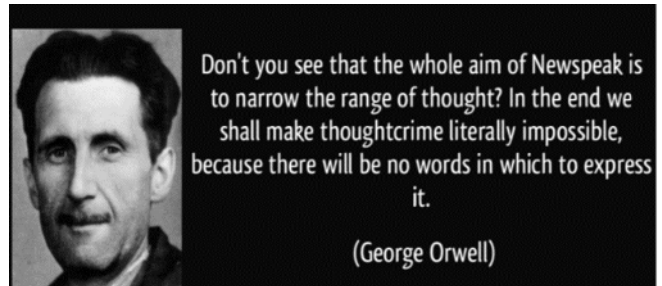
Perhaps the question to contemplate then: Is whether this reasoning is sound and is not merely a sweeping generalization? Conversely, might there be cause to consider that these claimants are themselves biased by their own aversions? Perhaps their bias is ushers from an effort to *preserve* the tradition-based experiences of their own childhood religion?

Perhaps they are merely attempting to cling to and defend their own fond attachments to their childhood religious experiences? But, when the rubber hits the road, the truth is that both Buddha-*ism* and "religion," are comprised of nothing but concepts.

Some have claimed that Buddha-*ism* is everything—all experiences, but in truth the Buddha's teachings are nothing at all. All of his teachings are *only* mere concepts, until, that is, when the teachings cause the effect of awakening to the truth about one's own experience, and one's own problems of existence. This awakening is the indisputable fulcrum point where "religion" departs from the Buddha Dhamma.

**Scrutiny:** "Critical observation or examination; the careful and detailed examination of something in order to obtain information about it."

– Oxford English Dictionary

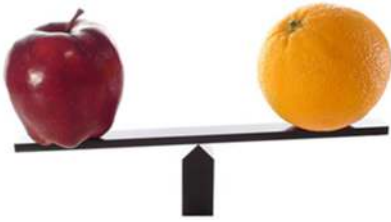


<sup>25</sup> **Takka:** Pali: तक्क Def: "Doubt; science of logic; (lit. "turning & twisting") to trick; to puzzle; a doubtful view (often= dīṭṭhi, appl. like sammā", micchā -- dīṭṭhi); hair-splitting reasoning; sophistry." Src: [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali\\_query.py?qs=takka&matchtype=default](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?qs=takka&matchtype=default)

<sup>26</sup> **Naya:** Pali: नय Def: "Method; plan; manner; inference; right conclusion; truth, system, logic (Dāvs iii.41.); fitness, right manner; propriety; right conduct; often appld to the "right path" (ariyamagga=ariyañāya Vin i.10) D iii.120; S v.19, 141, 167 Src: [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali\\_query.py?qs=naya&matchtype=default](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?qs=naya&matchtype=default)

<sup>27</sup> **Moha:** Pali: मोह Def: "Stupidity; delusion; dullness of mind; bewilderment; Def'd as "dukkhe aññāṇaṇ." Often coupled with rāga & dosa as one of the 3 cardinal effects of citta, making one unable to grasp the higher truths and to enter the Path (sotapanna)." Src: [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali\\_query.py?qs=moha&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?qs=moha&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact)

## Apples & Oranges



Intellectual knowledge of the Tipitaka alone cannot be the determinative foundation to support the claim that the Buddha's teachings constitute "religion." Knowledgeable truth is only gained from successfully practicing the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Noble Path. As it is with any discipline, there never is a substitute for direct personal experience and practice.



Suffice-it-to-say, no one will ever paint like Rembrandt by looking at a Rembrandt, studying a Rembrandt or having intellectual knowledge of

Rembrandt's life. This is a concept that the Buddha emphasized many times<sup>28</sup>.

Truth about the nature of reality is only accessible through practical application and direct personal experience, which is the cornerstone of awakening. No amount of intellectual knowledge will ever produce the state of Nibbana (*Pali*) (*Sanskrit/Nirvana*).

## What are the Qualifiers?

The criteria employed to determine whether a system qualifies as a religion is indisputably based on the Judeo-Christian model.

*"If the worldview of what constitutes a religion is **not** based on the Judeo-Christian theistic model, on what then is the worldview based?"*

Austin Cline, a Princeton graduate considered worldwide to be an expert on religion, wrote in an article in 2019, titled: "*What Is Religion? ...and the Problem of Defining Religion*"<sup>29</sup>, cites the Encyclopedia of Philosophy's definition of what constitutes a system as a religion:

*"The Encyclopedia of Philosophy lists traits of religions rather than declaring religion to be one thing or another, arguing that the more markers present in a belief system, the more "religious-like" it is. Thus, to be considered a religion these elements must exist:"*

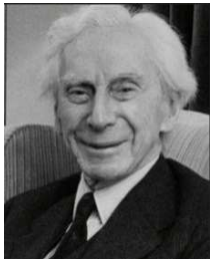
1. *Belief in supernatural beings.*
2. *A distinction between sacred and blasphemous objects.*
3. *Ritual acts focused on sacred objects.*
4. *A moral code believed to be sanctioned by the gods.*
5. *Characteristically religious feelings (awe, sense of mystery, sense of guilt, adoration), which tend to be aroused in the presence of sacred objects during the practice of ritual, and which are connected in concert with the gods.*
6. *Prayer and other forms of communication with gods.*
7. *A world view, or a general picture of the world as a whole, and the place of the individual therein. This picture contains some specification of an overall purpose or point of the world with the indication of how the individual fits into it.*
8. *A more or less total organization of one's life based on the world view.*

<sup>28</sup> Kalama Sutta: <https://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.065.than.html>

<sup>29</sup> What is Religion? <https://www.learnreligions.com/what-is-religion-250672>



This definition captures much of what religion is across diverse cultures. It includes sociological, psychological, and historical factors and allows for broader gray areas in the concept of religion. It also recognizes that "religion" exists on a continuum with other types of belief systems, such that some aren't religious at all, some are very close to religions, and some definitely are religions."

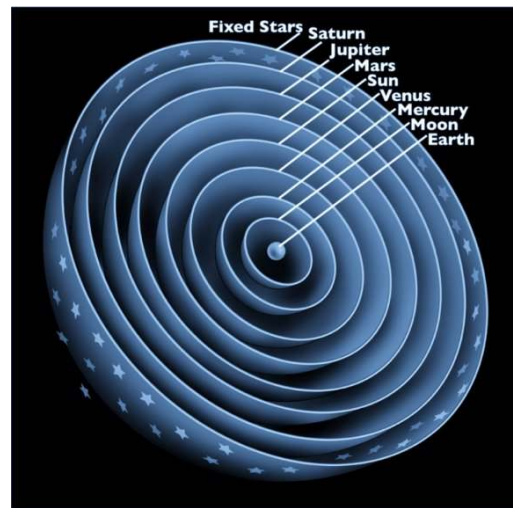


Addressing the validity of religion; the nature of reality and truth, Bertrand Russell's viewpoint may be apropos. "The fact that an opinion has been widely held is no evidence whatever that it [the opinion] is not utterly absurd."<sup>30</sup>

Additionally, in his famous essay, "Why I am Not a Christian"<sup>31</sup>, Russell comments on Hume's opinion that "belief" must be in proportion to the available evidence, which Russell made famous with his teapot analogy aimed at the philosophic concept of what constitutes a belief and religion:

*"If I were to suggest that between the Earth and Mars there is a china teapot revolving about the sun in an elliptical orbit, nobody would be able to disprove my assertion, provided I were careful to add that the teapot is too small to be revealed even by our most powerful telescopes.*

*But, if I were to go on to say that, since my assertion cannot be disproved, it is intolerable presumption on the part of human reason to doubt it, I should rightly be thought to be talking nonsense. If, however, the existence of such a teapot were affirmed in ancient books, taught as the sacred truth every Sunday, and instilled into the minds of children at school, hesitation to believe in its existence would become a mark of eccentricity and entitle the doubter to the attentions of the psychiatrist in an enlightened age or of the Inquisitor in an earlier time. It is customary to suppose that, if a belief is widespread, there must be something reasonable about it. I do not think this view can be held by anyone who has studied history."*



Because an idea or concept is deemed true by a consensus, doesn't automatically qualify the concept to be real, true or valid. In early history, the Medieval belief that the Sun revolved around the Earth, was considered heresy, a belief punishable by religious authorities<sup>32</sup>.

Buddha's teachings are a unique type of philosophy, and can therefore not be completely compared to any other specific philosophy. Like the Aardvark, the human being has no comparative relative. It is because of the uniqueness of the human being that Buddha's teachings emphasize the importance of experience. What makes human beings different from the animal realm? It is the highly developed consciousness that allows human beings to speak, and make intentional choices based on knowledge and experience. This is why the Buddha proclaimed:

*"It is very, very rare that one attains the human state."*

*-Samyutta Nikaya 56.48*

<sup>30</sup> Bertrand Russel: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/russell/#RA>

<sup>31</sup> Why I am not a Christian: <https://users.drew.edu/~jlenz/whynot.html>

<sup>32</sup> Galileo Heresy: Src: <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/galileo-is-accused-of-heresy>

## Contemplative Questions

**To reiterate:** “The worldview criteria used to determine whether a system is a religion is indisputably based on the Judeo-Christian model; a god or gods, other-worldly deities, prayer to a god or gods, devotional sacrifices to a god or gods, veneration and worship of other-worldly beings, orders from or of a god or gods impeding human nature, and so on. If the worldview of what constitutes a religion is **not** based on the Judeo-Christian theistic model, on what then is the world-view based?”

**Consider:** Would what the Buddha taught still be considered a religion if the Judeo-Christian religions didn't exist? If the Judeo-Christian or any theist-based belief system did not exist, could or would it still be argued that what the Buddha taught is religion? This is doubtful.

In the absence of the concept of religion, the Buddha's teachings would likely be grouped with the other various philosophies created by humankind; those being produced by the ancient Greeks, such as Logic, Stoicism, Epicureanism, Platonism, Sophism and so on. Over time, human beings have developed other categories of philosophical thought, separating each into various methodologies, such as; Metaphysics, Epistemology, Ethics, Ontology, Linguistics and Aesthetics<sup>33</sup>. These branches of philosophy are further delineated by various types of viewpoint, such as Traditionalism<sup>34</sup>, Structuralism<sup>35</sup>, Empiricism<sup>36</sup>, Rationalism<sup>37</sup>, Transcendentalism<sup>38</sup>, Naturalism<sup>39</sup>, and Pragmatism<sup>40</sup>.

**Consider:** If the Judeo-Christian elements of practice and doctrine could not be used to define the meaning of what a religion is, then what criteria could be used? Would the concept of religion even exist? From where does the concept of religion originate? The earliest known expression of religion by ancient humans begins between 7500 BCE to 6400 BCE<sup>41</sup>.

Is it not the Judeo-Christian theistic-based model that determines the modern-day definition of what a religion is? If such is the case, then Buddhism is incorrectly compared to this model. In whole, the teachings of the Buddha do not fit into the same model used to determine the parameters of what constitutes a religion, regardless of how one tries to squeeze the round peg into the square hole.

## The Soteriological Approach

Since the element of salvation or redemption, is not present in the Buddha's teachings, a soteriological<sup>42</sup> approach is not valid, but this method appears to be the one used by adherents who claim that Buddhism is a religion. Buddha's philosophy is not based on salvation or redemption of sins by the intercession of a god or god-like beings. Rather, Buddha's philosophy focuses on direct experience of the individual as the only viable truth.

<sup>33</sup> **Branches of Philosophy:** Src: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outline\\_of\\_philosophy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outline_of_philosophy)

<sup>34</sup> **Traditionalism:** Def Src: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Traditionalist\\_School\\_\(perennialism\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Traditionalist_School_(perennialism))

<sup>35</sup> **Structuralism:** Def Src: <https://www.britannica.com/science/structuralism-psychology>

<sup>36</sup> **Empiricism:** Def Src: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empiricism>

<sup>37</sup> **Rationalism:** Def Src: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rationalism>

<sup>38</sup> **Transcendentalism:** Def Src: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/transcendentalism/> | <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transcendentalism>

<sup>39</sup> **Naturalism:** Def Src: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/naturalism/> | <https://iep.utm.edu/naturali/>

<sup>40</sup> **Pragmatism:** Def Src: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pragmatism/> | <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pragmatism>

<sup>41</sup> **Çatalhöyük:** Earliest known expression of religious activity. Src: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%87atalh%C3%B6y%C3%BCk>

<sup>42</sup> **Soteriology:** “Salvation theory occupies a place of special significance in many religions. In the academic field of religious studies, soteriology is understood by scholars as representing a key theme in a number of different religions and is often studied in a comparative context; that is, comparing various ideas about what salvation is and how it is obtained.” Src: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soteriology>

However, Buddha emphasized the importance of the power and determination of an individual to deliver themselves from the distresses of life and the cycle of samsara. There is no prescription spoken of by the Buddha that even suggests the same concepts as the worldview meaning of salvation.

However, the Buddha's teachings are nothing more than conceptual, unless, and until, the individual experiences the results of the supernormal effects of understanding and practice of the Four Noble Truths. A side-by-side soteriological comparison of the teachings of the Buddha with the doctrines of theistic-based religions, reveals a chasm of opposing, incompatible elements<sup>43</sup>. Even when Pali translators use the word "salvation", there may be an inference value in the word itself, but the meaning of the word in theist-based religions has no correlation to what the Buddha taught or meant.

To anyone trained in the hermeneutics of the Pali language, religion-based comparative arguments reveals a dependency on specious concepts misrepresentative of the teachings of the Buddha regarding liberation. This is true regarding the word "salvation." Retrofitting words, such as "salvation," to the teachings of the Buddha, from a soteriological standpoint, is a spurious application of the word and creates misperceptions about what the Buddha taught. Yet, this concept is one that claimants dogmatically hold as truth. This is tantamount to the Buddha's warning of the results of grasping and clinging to views. The viewpoint that the teachings of the Buddha are like those taught by the World's religions is patently incorrect.

Dogmatically grasping at the concept that what the Buddha taught was religion, is clinging and attachment to a view. Buddha's view about what he taught would likely be neither religion nor not religion.

Religion should not even be considered a factor in determining what it was that the Buddha taught. Why? Because, no matter how you slice it, the Buddha Dhamma (Buddha's teachings) are merely concepts that only become realities through individual experience. The modern worldview application of the label "religion" simply does not apply. Religion as a concept, has absolutely nothing to do with what the Buddha taught.

### The Problem and the Solution

Buddha's teachings, particularly within the Four Noble Truths, defined and simplified the main problem of humankind. Dukkha; distress, dissatisfaction, suffering, and anything that causes stress. The solution is available in the Fourth Noble Truth, known as the Eightfold Noble Path. The solution to the problem is to be found in the experiential effects of applying the Eightfold Noble Path, not the doctrine. This path allows a person to awaken to the truth about themselves and their own life.

Clarity begins to break through the fog of conceptual thought, meaning, and definition, when understanding is gained through practical experience. Then, and only then, does knowledge of oneself, of one's own experiences, begin to make sense. One begins to experience the experiences separate from mental concepts, labels and doctrine. When this begins to happen, you are, in essence, awakening to the truth, and doing so, you begin living truthfully. This is **not** grasping at a view, a doctrine or a philosophy, living by label, but living within the truth of your own experiences.

Why is it necessary to insist that the teachings of the Buddha constitute a religion? Rather, is it not the creation of Buddha-*ism* that requires this labeling? Is it not the human creation of Buddha-*ism* that is the cause for the labeling or inclusion of "religion?"

<sup>43</sup> Differences between Christianity and Buddhism: Src: [https://www.diffen.com/difference/Buddhism\\_vs\\_Christianity](https://www.diffen.com/difference/Buddhism_vs_Christianity)

## How to Determine if a Teaching is from the Buddha

Adherents to the claim that what the Buddha taught parallels the worldview consensus of a religion, use artfully distorted questions to infer validity of their claims. Quotations of the Buddha's teachings are isolated and taken out of context to support their point of view. There is however, a way to determine if a teaching is a genuine teaching of the Buddha. The method is present in the earliest Pali texts known as the Nikayas, specifically the Dīgha Nikaya. One such text is the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, in the section called "The Four Great References"<sup>44</sup> (*mahāpadesa*), that outlines a set of criteria for determining whether a teaching is from the Buddha. This sutta states that four references are acceptable:

1. *The words of the Buddha himself, taught in person.*
2. *A community of Buddhist elders and their leader.*
3. *Several elder monks, who "are learned, who have accomplished their course, who are preservers of the Dhamma, the Discipline, and the Summaries."*
4. *A single monk, who "is learned, who has accomplished his course, who is a preserver of the Dhamma, the Discipline, and the Summaries."*

It is within this explanation, I believe, which calls for acknowledgement and inclusion of the teachings and commentaries contained in the Abhidhamma Pitaka and the Visuddhimagga. With regard to this subject, in an email exchange between Bhikkhu Bodhi and myself, Bhikkhu Bodhi stated:

*"Modern Buddhist scholars distinguish between the period of what is called "Early Buddhism" or "Archaic Buddhism," and the period called "Sectarian Buddhism." Early Buddhism is represented by the four Nikayas of the Pali Canon and the older portions of the Khuddaka Nikaya, the Vinaya Pitaka (at least the oldest portions of this), and by their counterparts from other schools preserved in Hybrid Sanskrit, Chinese translation, Gandhari, and other languages.*

*These texts, called "the Early Buddhist Texts," are most likely to come from the earliest period of Buddhist literary activity and thus to be closest to what the Buddha actually taught (but of this we can never be perfectly certain). Despite some differences in formulation, they set forth the same basic doctrinal positions and the same presentation of the practice, but without elaboration of details. Even then, there are differences, as can be seen in Analayo Bhikkhu's comparative study of the different versions of the Satipatthana Sutta (in his book, Perspectives on Satipatthana).*

*In the period of Sectarian Buddhism, the philosophical teachings and practices are elaborated in greater detail, but it is here that differences emerge between the schools. Each school, or at least several major schools, develops an Abhidharma and composes treatises that explain the doctrine and practice in the ways distinctive of that school. In the Pali school, there emerges in this period the seven-treatise Abhidhamma Pitaka, works like the Patisambhidamagga, the Niddesas, etc. At a somewhat later stage during this period, the commentaries are composed, and the main themes of the commentaries are combined into the manuals such as the Vimuttimaggā and the Visuddhimagga.*

*Some monks (usually Western monks) want to take as authoritative only the texts that can be assigned to the period of Early Buddhism, and so they rely only on the older portion of the Nikayas, rejecting as authoritative not only the Abhidhamma and commentaries, but even texts like the Patisambhida, which might have been composed in the 2nd or 1st century BCE."*

<sup>44</sup> **Four Great References:** Dīgha Nikaya 16:7-11, Src: <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.16.1-6.vaji.html#fn-37> | <http://buddhism.org/Sutras/DHARMA/Tripitaka/parinibbanaSutta4.htm#4>

In the cases where someone is not being directly taught by the Buddha, the text goes on to say that the hearer should check these teachings by "...carefully studying the sentences, word by word, tracing them in the Discourses and verifying them by the Discipline." If they are not traceable to the suttas, one should reject them.

An important distinction in the early Pali texts outlines the distinction between statements that are *Neyyatha* ("those needing to be drawn out/explained") and *Nītattha* ("those that are fully drawn out"). The Neyyatha Sutta<sup>45</sup> states:

"Monks, these two, slander the Tathagata<sup>46</sup>. Which two? He who explains a discourse whose meaning needs to be inferred as one whose meaning has already been fully drawn out. And he who explains a discourse whose meaning has already been fully drawn out as one whose meaning needs to be inferred. These are two who slander the Tathagata."

This teaching was later elaborated in the Theravada and Mahayana literature as conventional or relative truth (*sammuti- or voḥāra-sacca*) and ultimate truth (*paramattha-sacca*), which became known as the Two Truths teaching. Employing self-analysis directed at how a particular teaching affects one's experience and thinking is an important indicator as well.

The Gotami Sutta<sup>47</sup> states that anything that leads to dispassion, liberation, relinquishment, having few wishes, contentment, seclusion, arousing of energy and being easy to support are said to be the Buddha's authentic instruction, while anything that leads to the opposite of these qualities cannot be the true teaching of the Buddha. Hence, in the Early Buddhist texts, the work of hermeneutics is deeply tied with the spiritual practice and a mindful awareness of the effect our practices have on our state of mind.

In other words, the Gotami Sutta refers to those who attempt to re-explain the Buddha's teachings in order to infer ideas that are not directly the teachings of the Buddha. Information presented supporting their claims are merely simulacrum,<sup>48</sup> and is what the Buddha referred to as mental fabrications (*sankhara*)<sup>49</sup>. Real scrutiny of these arguments reveals a fundamental lack of knowledge of the Pali language. Buddha described the root of such irresponsible behavior with words such as: '*vicikicchā*<sup>50</sup>,' '*patigha*<sup>51</sup>,' '*mana [mānasa]*<sup>52</sup>,' and '*avijjā*<sup>53</sup>.'

<sup>45</sup> **Neyyatha Sutta:** Src: [https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/AN/AN2\\_24.html](https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/AN/AN2_24.html)

<sup>46</sup> **Tathagata:** "He who has won through to the truth."

<sup>47</sup> **Gotami Sutta:** Src: <https://accessinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an08/an08.053.than.html>

<sup>48</sup> **Simulacrum:** Def: "An insubstantial form or semblance of something; a trace." Src: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/simulacrum>

<sup>49</sup> **Sankhara:** (Meaning) Def: "All saṅkhāra arises in the mind. When they lead to conscious thinking or speech, they are called vaci saṅkhāra. Those conscious thoughts that lead to bodily actions are kāya saṅkhāra. On the other hand, manō saṅkhāra arise automatically in the mind. Therefore, "san" is associated with anything that one is thinking about doing. Src: <https://puredhamma.net/living-dhamma/nama-rupa-to-namarupa/four-mental-aggregates/sankhara-what-it-really-means/>

<sup>50</sup> **Vicikicchā:** [Vecikicchā] Pali: विचिकिच्छा Def: "Doubting, uncertain; doubtful; perplexity." Src: [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali\\_query.py?qs=vicikicch%C4%81&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?qs=vicikicch%C4%81&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact)

<sup>51</sup> **Patigha:** Pali: पटिघ Def: "[Ethically] Repulsion, repugnance, anger, collision; a psychological sensory reaction." Src: [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali\\_query.py?qs=pa%E1%B9%ADigha&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?qs=pa%E1%B9%ADigha&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact)

<sup>52</sup> **Mana:** [mānasa] Pali: (mana) माण (manasa) मानस Def: "Mind [mana citta]; thought measured by conceit; pride; intention; having the intention of." Src: [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali\\_query.py?page=519](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?page=519)

<sup>53</sup> **Avijjā:** Pali: अविज्जा Def: "Ignorance; error; the main root of evil and of continual rebirth." Src: [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali\\_query.py?qs=avijj%C4%81&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?qs=avijj%C4%81&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact)



To claim that what the Buddha taught constitutes a religion, is a concept that cannot be verified based on cherry-picked elements of the Buddha's original teachings, which seeks to compare them to modern-day sectarian and religious ideologies. This action then can only be described as an exercise in delusion. But, for what purpose? With what intent? What is the point? This shaky comparative foundation attempts to superimpose the worldview consensus of certain elements of existing ideologies and practices germane to the Judeo-Christian religions, onto what the Buddha taught. This, I believe, is the foundation of Buddha-ism.

One might be tempted, at this juncture, to ask: "Well, why shouldn't the teachings of the Buddha be compared to the tenets, doctrines and dogma of World religions?" In answer: To do so implies that the teachings of the Buddha are just as subject to change as the doctrines and tenets of the World's religions. Which, of course, they are not. That the Buddha's teachings are ultimate truths, one needs only to experience them, thus coming to an understanding of the purpose of the teachings. Why is this true? Because, through direct personal experience one comes to know that the teachings bring a solution to your own problems of existence.

Human beings use language to communicate everything. However, human language is clumsy, and does not always fully describe things like experiences. For example: If a person was beside themselves with worry about their debts, and unexpectedly received a large sum of money, proclaimed, "Salvation!" Does the use of this word mean that God sent money to them to pay their bills? No, that's just silly. We all know what the application of the word means in this instance. But, does being saved from negative circumstances always mean salvation? No. English words, like Pali words, have multiple meanings and so can be used in different ways.

### Ultimate Truth and Conventional Truth

Buddha taught that there were two kinds of truth. In describing the difference between these two, he used the Pali phrases, "*sammuti sacca*<sup>54</sup>," and "*paramattha sacca*<sup>55</sup>." *Sammuti sacca*<sup>56</sup>, means something agreed upon by consensus as "a conventional truth". *Sammuti* (sahm-yoo-tee) (सम्मुति) by itself, means: "General opinion; consent; in vogue; conventional use." The Pali word "*sacca*" simply means truth. Therefore, *sammuti sacca* refers to a type of truth that is conventional; truths that are commonly accepted via consensus, and so on. An example of a conventional truth would be that everyone agrees (by consensus) that an apple comes from an apple tree and not an orange tree or that fire is hot.

<sup>54</sup> *Sacca*: Pali: सच्च Def: "Truth, real, true." Src: [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali\\_query.py?qs=sacca&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?qs=sacca&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact)

<sup>55</sup> *Paramattha sacca*: Pali: परमत्थ Def: "The highest ideal; truth in the ultimate sense; highest, most excellent, superior, best; paraphrased by *agga setṭha viṣiṭṭha* at Nd2 502 A= Nd1 84, 102 (the latter reading *viṣeṭṭha* for *viṣiṭṭha*); by *uttama* at DhA iii.237; VvA 78. — D i.124 (ettaka°); M ii.120 (°nipacca); S i.166; ii.277; v.230; A v.64 (°diṭṭha-dhamma-nibbāna); Sn 138 (yasaṇ paramaṇ patto), 296 (°ā mittā), 788 (suddhaṇ °ṇ arogaṇ), 1071 (saññāvimokhe °e vimutto); Dh 184 (nibbānaṇ °ṇ vadanti Buddhā). 203, 243; Vv 161 (°alankata= paramaṇ ativiya visesato VvA 78) Pv ii.910 (°iddhi); Pug 15, 16, 66; SnA 453 (°issara); PvA 12 (°nipacca). 15 (°duggandha), 46. — At the end of a cpd. (-) "at the outmost, at the highest, at most; as a minimum, at least" Vin iv.263 (dvanguḷa-pabba°); esp. freq. in phrase *sattakkhattu°* one who will be reborn seven times at the outmost, i. e. at the end of the 7 rebirthinterval S ii.185 (sa°); v.205; A i.233; iv.381; v.120; It 18; Kvu 469. See *pārami* & *pāramitā*. -attha [cp. class. Sk. paramārtha] the highest good, ideal; truth in the ultimate sense, philosophical truth" Src: [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali\\_query.py?qs=parama&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?qs=parama&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact)

<sup>56</sup> *Sammuti sacca*: Pali: सम्मुति Def: "Common consent, general opinion, convention, that which is generally accepted; as ° - conventional, e. g. °sacca conventional truth (as opposed to paramattha° the absolute truth)." Src: [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali\\_query.py?qs=sammuti&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?qs=sammuti&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact)

Conventional truth is our everyday experience and understanding of the way the world appears and functions. By the nature of cognition, we understand the difference between a conventional truth and conventional falsehood. For example, conventional truth allows us to realize that there are consequences of distinguishing a snake from a rope. Therefore, the conventional truth of “being correct” matters. A conventional truth can never be an ultimate truth because conventional truths are concepts.

Conventional truths can be deceptive, whereas an ultimate truth cannot. However, humans frequently misinterpret or mis-perceive things because we all have our own core nature and experiences. This is an inherent characteristic of human senses, and it is this characteristic that is responsible for all of the suffering that humankind experiences. Therefore, conventional truths assert phenomena conceptually and linguistically, through the abstract construction and analysis by human sensing of conceptual objects.

*Paramattha* (परमत्थ) *sacca* refers to truth in the absolute or ultimate sense. A stable feature of absolute truth is that it is a kind of truth that is unconditional, untarnished, incorrupt, and unchangeable. Ultimate truth is never dependent on something. It is important to understand that an ultimate truth doesn’t mean a kind of transcendent reality, but it does mean a transcendence of deception or misperception.

### Ultimate Validity-Obscured by Concepts

Ultimate truths represent ultimate realities, which are characterized, not only from an ontological angle, but also from an epistemological<sup>57</sup> angle as the ultimate objects of correct knowledge.

In order for something to have the characteristics of ultimate validity, the something must exist in its own right as an irreducible reality. A concept can never possess the characteristics of ultimate validity, because the mode of being is conceptual not actual. For example: The purpose of the Buddha’s teachings was to provide instructions to experience the ultimate solution of the problem of existence.

The instructions he provided did not consist of secondhand messages delivered by a prophet which he later revealed to others. Rather, the instructions he provided were as a result of his own direct experience. There is no information or knowledge that is as valid as when such information is derived from personal direct experience. However, no other human being can know whether or not the Buddha’s direct experiences, from which his teachings were developed, are real or true, unless they experience the same thing for themselves.

The basic foundation of what the Buddha taught about, death, the cause of death, conditions; the causes behind effects; awareness, consciousness, stress, distress, suffering, all can be found to be ultimately valid because these things cannot be reduced to anything else. Death is death. Consciousness is consciousness, and stress is stress. All human beings “know” from direct personal experience that these things are true.

<sup>57</sup> **Epistemology:** Def: “From Ancient Greek ἐπιστήμη (epistēmē) 'knowledge', and -logy); branch of philosophy concerned with knowledge. Epistemologists study the nature, origin, scope of knowledge, epistemic justification, the rationality of belief, and various related issues.

This is just as true with regard to the First Law of Thermodynamics<sup>58</sup> as it is with the Buddha's teachings. In other words, the 'unchanging' and 'indivisible' nature of phenomena of all animate and inanimate things is called Absolute Truth<sup>59</sup>. All of the Buddha's teachings can be examined within the meaning of *paramattha sacca* (absolute truth). An example of such is found in the first teaching of the Buddha, known as the Four Noble Truths. They are called "Noble Truths" (*cattāri tathāni*) because they are 'real' (*tathā-ani*), 'supporting truth' (*avithā-ani*), and 'unchangeable' (*anaññathā-ani*) (Samyutta Nikaya: Tatha Sutta<sup>60</sup>). The first of these Noble Truths states:

*"All beings experience pain and misery (dukkha) during their lifetime: "Birth is pain, old age is pain, sickness is pain, death is pain; sorrow, grief, and anxiety is pain. Contact with the unpleasant is pain. Separating from the pleasant is pain. Not getting what one wants is pain. In short, the five assemblies of mind and matter that are subject to attachment are pain."*

Buddha's teaching: *"All beings experience pain and misery (dukkha) during their lifetime,"* isn't merely a conventional truth, but is an absolute truth. Examination of all the teachings shows all conform to *paramattha sacca*<sup>61</sup> or absolute truths. Ultimate truths are not the product of mental construction (*parikappa*)<sup>62</sup>, which are not realities existing by reason of their own nature.

Ultimate realities, which have the characteristic of ultimate **validity**, are so because they exist by reason of their own intrinsic nature (*sabhava*)<sup>63</sup>. Such things are called the true dhammas because they are the final irreducible components of existence; the **ultimate realities which result from a correctly performed analysis of experience**.

Herein lies the problem with most modern-day armchair philosophers who lack a "correctly performed analysis of experience." When the experience does not exist, the result can only be a derivative of mental constructs. Within the observation, knowledge, understanding and direct experience of an ultimate truth, one realizes; comes to know, that no further reduction can be found. The ultimate truth is then, by itself, the final term of analysis; the ultimate validity of the entire experience. This is why the Pali word *paramattha* (parama=ultimate; final) (attha=reality) is applied to these ultimate truths.

<sup>58</sup> **First Law of Thermodynamics:** "Law of conservation of energy states that the total energy of any isolated system is constant; energy can be transformed from one form to another, but can be neither created nor destroyed." Src:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First\\_law\\_of\\_thermodynamics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_law_of_thermodynamics)

<sup>59</sup> **Paramattha sacca:** Pure Dhamma Src: <https://puredhamma.net/forums/reply/18953/> | Pali Canon Src:

[http://www.palikanon.de/english/wtb/n\\_r/paramattha.htm](http://www.palikanon.de/english/wtb/n_r/paramattha.htm) | [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali\\_query.py?qs=parama&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?qs=parama&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact)

<sup>60</sup> **Tatha Sutta:** Src: [https://www.dhammadata.org/suttas/SN/SN56\\_20.html](https://www.dhammadata.org/suttas/SN/SN56_20.html)

<sup>61</sup> **Paramattha sacca:** [Ultimate Truth] Good Explanation: Src: <https://puredhamma.net/forums/topic/paramattha-sammuti-sacca-no-good-explanation/>

<sup>62</sup> **Parikappa:** Pali: परिकप्प Def: "Intention; assumption; supposition; stratagem (Th 1, 940); surmise." Src:

<https://suttacentral.net/search?query=parikappa> | [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali\\_query.py?qs=parikappa&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?qs=parikappa&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact)

<sup>63</sup> **Sabhava:** Pali: सभाव Def: "Nature; condition; disposition; reality; natural state of mind." Src: [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali\\_query.py?qs=sabh%C4%81va&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?qs=sabh%C4%81va&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact)

In order to see, with mental clarity, the difference between a conventional truth and an ultimate truth, direct experience is required. In order to see the ultimate realities in the essence of the Buddha's teachings, one must be able to recognize these subtleties. It is within these subtleties that the profoundness of the Buddha's teachings is realized. An ordinary person; one who only has a conceptual understanding of "Buddhism," but lacks training, is unable to perceive these subtleties.

The reason that such people are not able to see the ultimate realities is because the mind is obscured by concepts, specifically, the general concepts of the worldview of *Buddha-ism*, which simply re-shapes the teachings into conventionally acceptable appearances. Proving the old maxim that a little knowledge is dangerous.

### Conditioning & Mental Constructs

The Buddha taught that nothing is independent of anything else. Concepts, ideas, beliefs and opinions, are mental constructs and are subject to change. Religion, it could be claimed, is the most enduring of social and mental constructs. According to the Buddha, mental constructs can only be conventional truths. A conventional truth is temporary, and so is subject to change. An ultimate or absolute truth is permanent and is not subject to change and therefore, is not dependent on anything. That an apple, naturally comes from an apple tree, and not an orange tree, is a permanent and absolute truth, and is not (at least at present) subject to change.

However, dependent on the political and social milieu of the Age, the tenets, doctrines, practices and dogma of the Judeo-Christian religions, have changed immensely over time. Conversely, the original teachings of the Buddha have remained constant for some 2,600 years, regardless of the political, social and cultural milieu of the Ages.

Ontologically, consider that, with some degree of intelligence and knowledge, consensus exists that any arthropod<sup>64</sup> of the class Insecta<sup>65</sup>; having an adult stage characterized by three pairs of legs and a body segmented into head, thorax, and abdomen, usually having one or two pairs of wings, are insects. Therefore, a knowledgeable person would not claim that a worm is an arthropod. Furthermore, simply because a Chevrolet automobile has similarities with a Maserati, it cannot be claimed that all cars are Chevrolet's or Maserati's. While both contain similarities, they are completely different.

The only truth, conventionally speaking, is that both are automobiles. But, whether an object is an automobile is only true because of its aggregate parts, dependent on the construct of its constituent parts, assembled in a certain fashion. Whereby, a universal consensus (conventional truth) exists; that a conceptual construct of certain aggregate parts in fact is an automobile and not an airplane. The conventional truth tells us that there is a difference, particularly if we try and purchase a Maserati when we can only afford a Chevrolet. This analogy emphasizes that taking a single part of a Chevrolet automobile and stating that it is a Maserati, does not a Maserati make. Taking singular part of the Buddha's teachings and saying that they are the same as religion, does not make it a religion.

<sup>64</sup> **Arthropod:** Def: "Any of numerous invertebrate animals of the phylum Arthropoda, including the insects, crustaceans, arachnids, and myriapods, that are characterized by a chitinous exoskeleton, a segmented body, and jointed appendages. A jointed invertebrate animal with jointed legs."

<sup>65</sup> **Insecta** (class): Def: "Insecta (L. insectus, cut into) are the most diverse and abundant of all groups of arthropods." Src: [https://biocyclopedia.com/index/general\\_zoology/class\\_insecta.php](https://biocyclopedia.com/index/general_zoology/class_insecta.php)

Unlike comparing two similar things such as automobiles, there really is no objective comparison of the teachings of the Buddha and the Judeo-Christian doctrines, without selectively cherry-picking obscure practices with little to no knowledge of the context of which certain Pali words are used in the Suttas.

Human beings build constructs of ideas, concepts and perceptions, then create labels. The historical record reveals that humans have classified and labeled things as early as the writings of the ancient Egyptian philosopher Djehuty (Tehuti) some 36,000 years ago<sup>66</sup>. Since then, humans have developed many classifications of every aspect of our world. Classification is useful for legal, military, and taxonomical purposes. Categorization and labelling support the human proclivity for generalization or label-smoothing, as it might be called, but this carries inherent danger. The danger is the propensity of humans to go no deeper than the cursory meaning of a label. This is why, in the US legal system, there are many different classifications of intent, the doctrine of which is called *mens rea*.<sup>67</sup>

Classification or lumping things together on the basis of scant similarities, particularly for convenience sake, may serve some purposes for generalization of incidentals. However, to do so with an important category such as “religion” is, reckless and irresponsible. Why? Like the different levels of intent (*mens rea*) in a murder trial, there is a lot at stake. Classification of the Buddha’s teachings as religion, reduces, and in a manner, trivializes them. It is like pairing the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi with the Marquis de Sade. Lumping the teachings of the Buddha with the doctrines and cultural practices of religion, severely misrepresents, not only the intent of the Buddha, but the purpose and efficacy of his teachings.

Through the Middle Ages, the worldview consensus was that the Earth was flat<sup>68</sup>. Observational comparisons were made that a vast expanse of a flat desert or plain, led people to the conclusion that since this large expanse of land is flat, the whole Earth is flat. However, a logical, empirical, and ontological examination finds that a large flat expanse of land does not mean the Earth is the same. This same analogy applies to the teachings of the Buddha. Observation of one sample, one part of the teachings is not representative of the whole.

The idiom: “*If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and sounds like a duck, it must be a duck,*” assumes that one knows what a duck is. How would it be possible to identify something as a duck if one has no knowledge of a duck? This is the exact position of the one claiming that the teachings of the Buddha constitute “religion.” With little to no in-depth understanding of the Pali language or the contextual applications effecting the meaning of Pali words; how can a claim that the Buddha’s teachings are a religion be valid? Most often this is done from a purely personal viewpoint. This is not an objective comparison.

Certainly, any critical claims made, must be based on a wider perspective and understanding of the contextual dialogue of the Buddha’s use of specific words and phrases. In this sense then, the observer does not know what a duck is in order to make a valid claim that something is in fact a duck. The point is that simply because characteristics of the Buddha’s teachings represent universal, commonsense ideas, do not make them the “same as” those of the various religions of the world. This is tantamount to comparing apples to camels. There simply is no basis for any comparative criteria.

<sup>66</sup> Emerald Tablet of Djehuty: *Src:* <http://moreesemadu.com/ancient-texts-before-the-bible/>

<sup>67</sup> Mens rea: *Def:* “Mens rea (/ˈmɛnz ˈreɪə/; Law Latin for “guilty mind”) is the mental element of a person’s intention to commit a crime; or knowledge that one’s action or lack of action would cause a crime to be committed. It is a necessary element of many crimes.” *Src:* [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mens\\_rea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mens_rea)

<sup>68</sup> Flat Earth: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flat\\_Earth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flat_Earth)



While the Buddha was alive, no indication exists in the Pali texts where he approved of the ideas, concepts, doctrines or dogma of the Brahmins, Hindus or Jains. There is nothing to indicate that the Buddha would act differently with the Judeo-Christian ideas, concepts, or doctrines.

Certainly, there were concepts such as kamma that existed before the Buddha, brought to India by the Indo-Aryans. Although the Buddha did not deny or replace the concept of kamma, instead, he refined and clarified the understanding of kamma and how it is linked to the cycle of samsara.

For all of the armchair philosophers, monks and nuns who believe Buddhism is a religion, consider this: Given that the Buddha rejected the religious teachings of his time, is it likely that he would accept modern religions? Which of the current existing religions would he approve? This question is more salient since the Buddha believed that theistic beliefs were detrimental to the believer. In a Dhamma talk, presented by the President of the Buddhist Council of America, Theravadin bhikkhu Dhammananda Mahaprabu, states:

*“Buddhism is not a religion. It’s not a faith or belief system. It is completely a science of the mind. It is full of psychology; how to control the mind. It is not a religion of faith. Buddhism is about experience and practice. The Buddha gave his own experience; what he practiced. He talked to the people and gave 84,000 teachings. He said the mind is the chief; the mind is the architect. The mind creates everything.”<sup>69</sup>*

In the Majjhima Nikaya, Buddha clearly rejected belief in a Supreme Deity. History has proven the Buddha to be correct in this regard.

*“So, then, owing to the creation of a Supreme Deity, men will become murderers, thieves, unchaste, liars, slanderers, abusive, babblers, covetous, malicious and perverse in view. Thus, for those who fall back on the creation of a God as the essential reason, there is neither desire nor effort nor necessity to do this deed or abstain from that deed.”<sup>70</sup>*

## No Buddhist Prophets

Judeo-Christian based faiths all rely on the word or testimony of prophets. Prophets, according to the standard worldview consensus, “were individuals said to possess an intimate association with a god or gods, and conducted the business of transmitting messages between the divine and earthly realms. They spoke on behalf of the god or gods, occasionally soliciting requests from the deity or brought to the deity requests of others.”<sup>71</sup> | <sup>72</sup>

Buddha was not a prophet who transmitted the word of a divine entity to a special group of persons, such as Moses transmission of God’s commandments to the Hebrews. Interestingly, such prophetic transmissions are always conveniently hidden from the average human being, and always require interpretation. Understanding and knowledge of such prophetic teachings relies on the interpretation of the prophet, such as is the case with Moses, Aaron, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, and so on.

A modern-day prophet, Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, claimed that an angel revealed ancient golden plates containing the last prophesy of God. These plates, were written in early Egyptian hieroglyphs, which is strange as Yahweh did not show favor to the Egyptians.

<sup>69</sup> Buddhism is not a Religion: Dhammananda Mahaprabu: Src: <https://youtu.be/KRcEyQy44cl?t=558>

<sup>70</sup> Buddha’s teaching about belief in a Supreme God: Majjhima Nikāya ii, p. 222. Sutta No. 101

<sup>71</sup> Prophets in the Hebrew Texts: Src: <https://oxfordre.com/religion/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-109>

<sup>72</sup> Prophets of Christianity: Src: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prophets\\_of\\_Christianity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prophets_of_Christianity)

This angel forbade Smith to show the plates to anyone until they had been translated from their original "reformed Egyptian" language. Smith purportedly dictated the text of the plates while a scribe wrote down the words, which would later become the Book of Mormon.

Eyewitnesses to Smith's dictation claim that he translated the plates, not by looking directly at them, but by looking through a transparent seer stone in the bottom of his hat. After the translation was complete, Smith said that he returned the plates to the angel; thus, the plates could never be examined by anyone else<sup>73</sup>.

For a while, there was a claim by Christians that Jesus had been foretold as a prophet in the text of the ancient Vedas, which predate Christianity by several thousand years. However, this claim was debunked as an interpolation<sup>74</sup> added much later in the eighteenth century<sup>75</sup>.

During the time that the Buddha was alive, the so-called worldview of religion was limited to that of the various branches of belief systems based on the Vedas; Upanishads and the Rig Veda. These texts are the creation of the early Indo-Aryan peoples, which likely included the people of the Harrapan and Mohenjo-Daro cultures before the time of the Buddha<sup>76</sup>.

Those claiming Buddhism to be a religion commonly utilize broad facts about Buddhism, synthesized from scant Internet searches of sites both Buddhist and non-Buddhist. These broad facts are then compared to the accepted worldview of religion; completely excluding any direct personal experience due to actual practice.

Basing comparative evaluations of Buddhism by reading about someone else's experiences, can only provide mere intellectual, scholastic knowledge. This is where the fodder for developing the idea that the teachings of the Buddha are the same as religion is engineered. A claim of homogeneity between religion and Buddhism, demands a more critical standard of evaluation.

## Ontological Considerations<sup>77</sup>

The standard used for testing whether something is identical to something else, is known as ontology. Ontological criteria utilize the elements of both subjects, scrutinizing specific linguistics, concepts, definitions, philosophical elements, and so on, in order to determine identity. Comparing Buddhism to the Judeo-Christian worldview model of religion means scrutinizing and examining, in detail, the specific elements of both. Examining the elements of doctrine and practice, of both the Judeo-Christian systems and Buddhism to determine whether both are identical, first requires that the elements of each category exist as "identical" on the most fundamental levels of proof.

## What is Being Compared

For the purposes of this ontological examination, the comparison between the worldview standard model of religion and the teachings of the Buddha, must be restricted to doctrine only. Why? Specifically, the doctrine of both models being compared create the foundational elements that define the characteristics beliefs and practices of each system.

<sup>73</sup> **Joseph Smith's Golden Plates:** Src: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden\\_plates](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_plates)

<sup>74</sup> **Interpolation (literary):** Def: "The process of adding words, phrases, or, entire sentences (depending on punctuation) to the Bible - and thus sanctifying the maunderings of a mere human as Holy Writ."

<sup>75</sup> **Jesus in the Vedas:** Src: <https://www.sanskritimagazine.com/indian-religions/hinduism/really-prophecy-jesus-vedas/>

<sup>76</sup> **Vedic Timeframe:** [https://books.google.com/books?id=Q5kl02\\_zW70C&pg=PA106#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=Q5kl02_zW70C&pg=PA106#v=onepage&q&f=false)

<sup>77</sup> **Ontological viewpoint of Religion:** <https://www.philosophyofreligion.uk/theistic-proofs/the-ontological-argument/>

Regardless of culture, ceremonies, and practices that have been adopted throughout the ages, including those of Buddhism, this paper considers only the doctrines. By doing so, this ontological examination compares only the base teachings. In the case of Judeo-Christianity, the doctrines espoused in the Biblical text are compared to the teachings of the Buddha. In this way the examination is restricted only to the tenets taught by the **personages** responsible for the doctrines that were written or taught.

Having already determined that Judeo-Christianity is the source of the worldview model of what constitutes a religion, next follows the application of an ontological examination of the elements of both, which must reveal “sameness,” meaning an identicalness of elements, in order to prove that Buddhism is a religion. Keep in mind that an ontological examination of “same” does not mean “similar.” In order to conclude that there is indiscernibleness (identity), the elements being compared must be identical.

For the purposes of an ontological comparison of the teachings of the Buddha; his doctrines, tenets and practice cannot be pulled apart, piece by piece, in order to satisfy a claim of sameness. Buddha’s teachings are critically interlinked to form a holistic completeness. Therefore, taken as a whole, an ontological indiscernibleness (identity) cannot be made.

However, any concept of ontological sameness presents with a massive flaw. The criteria used to designate the elements constituting a religion, are dependent on the assumption that the teachings of the Buddha match the ontological test of indiscernibleness (identity), which of course, they do not, due to the fact that there are infinite flaws in the specific categories themselves.

Applying an ontological test reveals that neither the teachings, and consequentially the direct experience gained through practical application of those teachings, are in any way related to theist-based Judeo-Christian concepts.

An entity (element), ontologically depends on another element if the first element cannot exist without the second element. When comparing the elemental teachings of the Buddha to theist-based Judeo-Christian systems, a rigid dichotomy is revealed, in that the stark differences are demonstrably discernable due to the differences of the basic elements of each.

When compared things are discernable (not the same/not identical), within the context of ontology, then the things being compared are not like the other. When a comparison is made and there is no difference between the things being compared, then the “things” are found to be indiscernible, meaning they are identical.

### Discernibleness is in the Context of the Doctrines

**Ontologically**, there exist many discernable elements within the context of the Buddha’s teachings, clearly separating them from the tenets, doctrines and practices of the World’s religions. In this, the knowledgeable ontological researcher discovers that Buddhism cannot be considered a religion, because of the near total discernibleness between the two. Such a researcher inevitably discovers that, more than a belief system, the Buddha’s teachings are ontologically more analogous of philosophy, and a psychological examination of the human mind.

The Buddha’s teachings are, in-and-of themselves, unique. This uniqueness is the foundation for ontological discernibleness (non-identity) when the teachings are compared to the world-view of religion. A ‘**type of identity**’ is important to a basic ontological concept, which is expressed by the word “same,” in the specific meaning of identity. Therefore, two qualitatively identical things are called indiscernible in ontology.

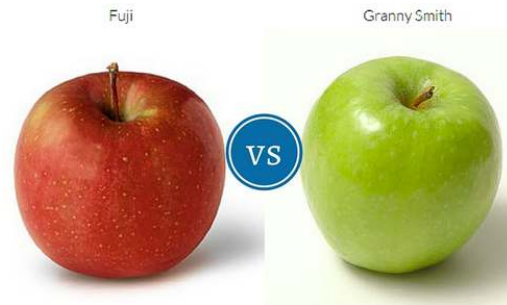
When two things do not meet the test of indiscernibleness (sameness or identicalness) then the properties of the elements being compared are considered discernable, meaning not the same or non-identical. Two elements are determined by two principles: the principle of indiscernibility of identicals, and the principle of identity of indiscernibles.

Therefore, ontologically speaking, the comparison of the teachings of the Buddha and theist-based Judeo-Christian systems, are clearly discernable; meaning that the compared elements, are not the same. Yet, those who claim that the teachings of the Buddha constitute sameness, with regard to the determination that Buddhism is a religion, assume an ontological indiscernibleness, but factually instead, reveals blatant discernibleness.

Upon close examination, an ontological survey reveals that the basis for the “religion” claim, is merely constructed **on** similarities. However, similarity is not sameness. Without clear indiscernibleness of difference, something that is ‘like’ or similar to another thing, is not identical. An apple and an orange are both fruits, but an apple is not an orange. Therefore, an apple is discernably different from an orange. Fuji and Granny Smiths are both apples, but there is a clear discernibleness. Only a portion of the elemental characteristics are similar, but the whole is not the same (indiscernible). This is exactly the case with the word “salvation.” One meaning of salvation includes the God element, and one does not. Therefore, like the Fuji and Granny Smith apples, they are different from one another. The similarity between the Fujis and the Granny Smiths is that they are both apples, but very different in every other way.

In this application Buddhism is placed as a mono-categorical entity with theist-based religions, holding that there is only one basic category, namely that of the indiscernibleness between the teachings of the Buddha and theist-based Judeo-Christian systems.

However, upon simple examination, one discovers that there are innumerable elements of the Buddha’s teachings that are wholly unique, and are in no manner the “same” as theistic-based religions.



Rendering the teachings of the Buddha as a religion without the application of an ontological test, can therefore only be subjective, not objective. This subjectivity is based on the premise that the categorical teachings of the Buddha are the same as theistic-based Judeo-Christian systems. Since no factual indiscernibleness can be reached, the ontological premise of “sameness” is null and void; there is no identicalness or ontological “same.”

Buddha’s teachings, ontologically speaking, present with major differences when compared to modern-day Judeo-Christian concepts. Major discernibleness becomes most evident when personally applying the teachings of the Buddha. By doing so, one gradually begins to understand that many of the words or concepts of the Buddha recorded in the Pali texts, which may be similarly used by the World’s religions, have entirely different meanings.

Often times the transliteration of a Pali word into English does not convey the correct or full meaning. But, in the process of learning the correct Pali meanings, the elements of discernibleness are clearly understood. One can no longer lump the teachings of the Buddha with the common-language usage ‘religious’ meanings.

### Examining the Claims: *Reductio ad Absurdum*<sup>78</sup>

In light of this discernment then, many who make the claim that Buddhism is a religion, clearly are making a generalized, non-ontologically compliant finding with no real basis of fact. For if claimants were to thoroughly understand the context of the Buddha's teachings, they would realize the like-comparison to not only be untrue, but patently incorrect. Various generalized points are given by claimants, which are made to bolster their point of view that Buddhism is a religion. These are each critically and ontologically examined.

**Claim #1:** Life after death: citing samsara, nirvana, rebirth, and kamma as proof of "sameness" as to the doctrines of the World's religions.

**Reality Check:** If a claimant understood the teachings of the Buddha, and in what context the teachings were given, no claim of indiscernibleness is possible. According to Thanissaro Bhikkhu, samsara (*lit. sansara*) literally means "wandering-on;" it is a process<sup>79</sup>. Additionally, nibbana (*Sanskrit nirvana*), literally means "a blowing out." A thorough investigation of the Pali meaning of nibbana, reveals it to be a mental state of being<sup>80</sup>, only attained after liberation from the five khandas<sup>81</sup>; without cravings. The entire context of the teachings refers to the end of kammic existence and has nothing to do with life after death in the world-view sense of religion. There is absolutely no contextual correlation of this teaching that is comparable to any theistic Judeo-Christian doctrine.

With regard to rebirth as an element of proof that this teaching of the Buddha is the same as in Judeo-Christianity; there is not even a similar correlation, therefore, no "sameness;" there is a clear discernibleness. Judeo-Christianity has no doctrine of rebirth whatsoever. Additionally, the first law of Thermodynamics<sup>82</sup> is of some significance here. The law of conservation of energy states that the total energy of an isolated system is constant; energy can be transformed from one form to another, but can be neither created nor destroyed," which explains the conservation of energy of all existence in the Universe. This scientific law correlates with the kammic system of rebirth.

Since human consciousness is connected with the energy of the brain, by which we create mental formations, as the Buddha taught, it is likely that if there were any scientific theory to prove rebirth, it could be found in the Law of the Conservation of Energy. Regarding kamma as a part of the stream of human consciousness, it is not far-fetched to consider that the human energy of our volitional, intentional, actions remains stable within some kammic imprint.

Amit Goswami, who holds his doctorate in Quantum Physics, makes the following statement concerning the probability of kamma:

*"Quantum memory"<sup>83</sup> (energy memory) weights probabilities in favor of past experiences; this creates a predisposition, and it is through this predisposition that karma travels from one physical incarnation to another<sup>84</sup>."*

<sup>78</sup> **Reductio ad Absurdum:** (*Latin*) Explanation Src: <https://iep.utm.edu/reductio/>

<sup>79</sup> **Samsara:** meaning – Thanissaro Bhikkhu: <https://www.accesstosight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/samsara.html>

<sup>80</sup> **Nibbana:** Pali Text Society: [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali\\_query.py?qs=nibbana&searchhws=yes](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?qs=nibbana&searchhws=yes)

<sup>81</sup> **Five Khandas (e.g. Five Aggregates):** <https://www.accesstosight.org/lib/study/khandha.html>

<sup>82</sup> **First Law of Thermodynamics:** [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First\\_law\\_of\\_thermodynamics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_law_of_thermodynamics)

<sup>83</sup> **Quantum Memory:** *ibid* "Physicist, Howard Carmichael, has shown by statistical calculations that the solution of nonlinear Schrodinger equations for a photon in a resonant cavity, also acquires conditioning, thus providing an independent verification of the idea of quantum memory."

<sup>84</sup> **Goswami, Amit,** "Physics of the Soul," Hampton Roads Publishing, Ch. 7, © 2001



**Claim #2:** Because the Buddha is the central figure of Buddhism, he holds the same position as other central figures of religions in the world-view sense.

**Reality Check:** Islam's central figure is an unseen Supreme God, and creator, Allah. The unseen creator God, Yahweh, Jehovah, Elohim, or El, as he has been called throughout the Ages, is the Supreme God of all Judeo-Christian religions. Again, applying ontological rules, the man Siddhartha Gautama, who became awakened (a Buddha), holds absolutely no "sameness," with regard to an indiscernibleness between himself and the central God figures of theistic-based religions.

The Buddha was a human being, and has never been equated, in any manner, as being a supreme god-like being or otherworldly celestial entity with more wisdom, knowledge and control of human beings. There is clear ontological discernibleness.

**Claim #3:** The Buddha teaches salvation, the same as any other world-view religion; that suffering can be transformed, and the Buddha's salvation is the end of wrong actions.

**Reality Check:** The Buddha did not teach a kind of salvation. Rather, he taught a way and means of self-liberation from ignorance. The Pali word most translated as 'salvation' is *mokkha*, which literally means "release from; freedom from." Christian teachings state that salvation is the "saving [of] human beings from sin and its consequences, which include death and separation from God by Christ's death, and resurrection, thus justification for this salvation<sup>85</sup>."

Islamic salvation states that "the purpose of life is to live in a way that is pleasing to Allah, so that one may gain Paradise. The Muslim doctrine of salvation is that unbelievers (kuffar, literally "those who are ungrateful") and sinners will be condemned, but genuine repentance results in Allah's forgiveness and entrance into Paradise upon death."<sup>86</sup>

In Zoroastrianism, a religion that is similar to Judaism, salvation lies with the unseen god Ahura Mazda, followers therefore are to live according to his righteous example. In Judaism, being born a Jew means that you already qualify as one of God's favored.

*"We Children of Israel are righteous. For the Torah says so. Of course, we must uphold the Torah, or otherwise we might cease to be righteous. But as long as we keep the Torah, we are righteous." Therefore, Judaism does not specifically have a doctrine of salvation. "God's salvation approaches; and finally, salvation is established in Zion for Israel, God's splendor (Isa. xlv. 13). In this sense, then, the Messiah is a savior; his kingdom, one of salvation."<sup>87</sup>*

The Buddha has nothing whatsoever to do with another human beings so-called salvation. In comparison to the worldview definition of salvation, the Buddha did not specifically teach such, and was never inferred as a savior nor as an intermediary of human wrongdoing. The Buddha taught that liberation from craving and the cycle of samsara was the responsibility of each human being. Therefore, only the individual is able to "remove" themselves from the cycle of suffering, death and rebirth (samsara).

<sup>85</sup> **Christian salvation/atonement:** Stanford Encyclopedia of Theology- <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/christiantheology-philosophy/#BibAto>

<sup>86</sup> **Islamic salvation:** <https://religionfacts.com/islam/salvation>

<sup>87</sup> **Judaism salvation:** <https://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13051-salvation>

Although subjectively, there may appear to be some similarity of “salvation” between the worldview meaning with that of the Buddha; the meaning, context and etymology of the word *mokkha*<sup>88</sup>, reveals the contextual meaning of the Buddha’s teaching to be liberation caused by one’s own actions. This stands in stark contrast when compared to the worldview meaning and context of salvation. Compare the Pali meaning to the context of the Church Latin word *salvationem*,<sup>89</sup> implies intercession and a deliverance from the power of sin.

So again, ontologically speaking, here we are presented with yet another example of discernibleness. A mere subjective inclusion based on similarity alone, does not pass the ontological test for “same as.” Neither does subjective inclusion, based on the fact that “salvation” seems a common element, qualify the Buddha’s teachings to be considered a religion in the worldview meaning.

**Claim #4:** Buddhism contains divisions of “holy” people known as monks and nuns, which qualify Buddhism to be included in the worldview meaning of religion.

**Reality Check:** Again, a literal translation not fitting with the worldview definition of a religion. The Pali word *bhikkhu* is commonly translated as “monk.” However, the literal translation<sup>90</sup> is “almsman” for a male, and “almswoman” for female. A common alternative translation is “beggar.” No absolute ontological indiscernibility exists. No worldview element of any of the World’s religions contain this “same” meaning.

All Buddhist monks and nuns are mendicants, meaning a person who begs for their subsistence. Unlike priests, ministers, bishops, cardinals, hafiz or imams, a Buddhist monk or nun is basically a student, sometimes a teacher, but all are simply monastics, and receive no compensation. All Judeo-Christian clerics rely on paychecks received from either a diocese or a central operating organization. This practice always seemed odd because of Jesus’ admonition recorded in Mathew 10:8-10:

*“Don't take any money in your money belts — no gold, silver, or even copper coins. Don't carry a traveler's bag with a change of clothes and sandals or even a walking stick. Don't hesitate to accept hospitality, because those who work deserve to be fed.”*

Again, in Mathew 10:7, Jesus tells his disciples:

*“Go and preach, The Kingdom of heaven is near! Heal the sick, bring the dead back to life, heal those who suffer from dreaded skin diseases, and drive out demons. You have received without paying, so give without being paid. Do not carry any gold, silver, or copper money in your pockets; do not carry a beggar's bag for the trip or an extra shirt or shoes or a walking stick. Workers should be given what they need.”*

Here again we are faced with inclusion of a misinterpreted single isolated element, subjectively applied to the argument that this one element qualifies the teachings of the Buddha to be considered a religion. Generalizations based on scant similarity do not pass the ontological test for “same as,” thus, indiscernible. Buddhist monks and nuns are not paid a penny...ever. They rely on the goodwill and generosity of the community.

<sup>88</sup> **Mokkha:** Pali: (मोक्ख) Def: “Emancipation; liberation. From suffering and death; release; freedom” Src: [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali\\_query.py?qs=mokkha&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?qs=mokkha&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact)

<sup>89</sup> **Salvation:** Latin Etymology: “c. 1200, savacioun, saluatiun, sauvacioun, originally in the Christian sense, “the saving of the soul, deliverance from the power of sin and admission to eternal bliss,” from Old French *salvaciun* and directly from Late Latin *salvationem* (nominative *salvatio*, a Church Latin translation of Greek *soteria*), noun of action from past-participle stem of *salvare* “to save”

<sup>90</sup> *Bhikkhu/bhikkhuni* (monk): [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali\\_query.py?qs=bhikkhu&searchhws=yes](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?qs=bhikkhu&searchhws=yes)

**Claim #5:** Because Buddhists have organizations and temples, this element qualifies all Buddhists for inclusion as a religion.

**Reality Check:** The Buddha created no rule or doctrine commanding followers to build temples and create organizations. All such temples and organizations are the mental creations of humans. Buddhist temples and monasteries do not carry the same connotative meaning as do those in the Judeo-Christian religions.

Since the time of the Buddha, a central organization has never existed. Neither has there ever been a central organizing figure similar to the Vatican and the Catholic Pope. Judaism is, by all intent and purpose, headed by the World Jewish Congress<sup>91</sup>. All Christian denominations have a central authority. As of 2014, the total number of Christian denominations in the World was 45,000. Buddhist temples and monasteries are not places-of-worship, and never have been, because no tenet of “worship” exists within the Buddha’s teachings.

Examination of Buddhism throughout the world reveals it to be the most disorganized in terms of the world-view meaning of a religious organization. Although the Dalai Lama is a very famous bhikkhu (monk), he is not the head representative of Buddhism; an explanation which the Dalai Lama gives of himself. There is no head monk or other personage who oversees or directs the dissemination of the Buddha’s teachings or manages Buddhist temples around the world.

Whatever organization exists within each monastery, exists because of the teachings of the Buddha. From a Buddhist perspective, temples are frequently connected to a monastery, and are considered to be centers for teaching and learning, not worship.

### Philological Considerations

Philology<sup>92</sup> is a discipline that studies the history, linguistics, etymology and usage of words and phrases. An interpolation is the intentional act of a writer who adds, changes or interjects language into ancient biblical texts. Many interpolations are traced to particular writers. For example; interpolations of the New Testament Bible match the style of writing, grammar and word usage of the philosopher Pliny the Younger; the ancient Roman historian Suetonius, and possibly Plutarch. All of these and more are suspect in the creation and writing of several books of the New Testament. These people all lived during the time the New Testament was written.

Christian denominations use different Bible translations. Although purported to be the word of a God, it contains innumerable discrepancies and proven interpolations from one translation to the next. Ancient Biblical texts, such as the Septuagint, written in Greek, differ greatly from modern Biblical texts. Over the last several decades, forensic philologists have studied the content, context, grammar and etymology of ancient biblical texts. Their findings are that many of the texts, particularly those known as the New Testament, are replete with interpolations<sup>93</sup>.

<sup>91</sup> World Jewish Council: <https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en>

<sup>92</sup> **Philology:** Def: “The study of language in oral and written historical sources; it is the intersection of textual criticism, literary criticism, history, and linguistics (with especially strong ties to etymology).[1][2][3] Philology is more commonly defined as the study of literary texts as well as oral and written records, the establishment of their authenticity and their original form, and the determination of their meaning. A person who pursues this kind of study is known as a philologist.” Src: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philology>

<sup>93</sup> **Interpolation** (Specifically related to Judeo-Christianity): [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interpolation\\_\(manuscripts\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interpolation_(manuscripts)) | <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20111010102426482> | [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian\\_interpolation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_interpolation) | [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josephus\\_on\\_Jesus#The\\_Testimonium\\_Flavianum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josephus_on_Jesus#The_Testimonium_Flavianum) | [https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Bible\\_interpolation](https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Bible_interpolation)

Several recent books have been written revealing that the creation of the New Testament was directed and funded by two Roman Emperors, Vespasian and Titus <sup>94</sup>|<sup>95</sup>|<sup>96</sup>|<sup>97</sup>|<sup>98</sup>. All of these books are based on science, archaeology, philology, and etymology.

Conversely however, the modern translations of the Pali texts, do not differ from the earliest texts written after 250 B.C.E. (BC) and before 1 B.C.E. (BC). This is proven by the recently discovered Gandhāran texts<sup>99</sup> (Top of Page), found in Afghanistan, dated between 3 C.E. (AD) and 1 C.E. (AD). Some words in these texts are written in other ancient languages, however, philological investigations have confirmed that the context and meaning remain the same as the modern-day Pali texts. Religion scholar Barbara O'Brien<sup>100</sup> states:

*"It should be remembered that Buddhism is not a "revealed" religion — meaning it's scriptures are not assumed to be the revealed wisdom of a God. Buddhists are not sworn to accept every word as literal truth. Instead, we rely on our own insight, and the insight of our teachers, to interpret these early texts."*

Examination of Buddhism throughout the world reveals it to be the most disorganized in terms of the world-view meaning of a religious organization. Although the Dalai Lama is a very famous bhikkhu (monk), he is not the head representative of Buddhism; an explanation which the Dalai Lama gives of himself. There is no head monk or other personage who oversees or directs the teachings of the Buddha or temples around the world.

What exactly does the phrase "religious organization" mean? This is a mental construct, a concept. Does the meaning of "religious organization" have a different meaning outside of any other organization, such as the Red Cross, the IRS or American Cancer Society? Do the buildings that such organizations use, define whether an organization is religious or not? Evidently it does. All buildings used by the World's religions are considered places where the God of the religion can be contacted. Certain rites and rituals are performed at such a place because of the concept of the presence of a god or saints. In the West, such buildings are commonly referred to as "the houses of God," and are considered holy places.

Buddha did not teach, instruct or suggest that his followers must build temples. In fact, the Buddha discouraged anything remotely indicative of worship, directing that only the community of monks and nuns (the sangha), and the Buddha's teachings (the Dhamma) should be one's refuge, not the Buddha as an object of veneration or worship. According to the Buddha's words recorded in the Pali texts, he stated:

*"Live with yourself as your island, yourself as your refuge, with nothing else as your refuge. Live with the Dhamma (teachings) as your island, the Dhamma as your refuge, with nothing else as your refuge."*<sup>101</sup>

<sup>94</sup> **Creating Christ:** Valliant, James S., <https://www.creatingchrist.com/> | <https://youtu.be/aSixd9lP9X4> | <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ilF5NIZnoq4>

<sup>95</sup> **Creating Christianity:** Davis, Henry, <https://www.henryhdavis.com/book>

<sup>96</sup> **Operation Messiah:** Voskuilen, Thijs, Sheldon, Rose Mary, PhD <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/7634081-operation-messiah>

<sup>97</sup> **Out of Egypt: The Roots of Christianity:** Osman, Ahmed, <http://www.domainofman.com/ankhemmaat/osman.html>

<sup>98</sup> **Caesar's Messiah:** Atwill, Joseph, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caesar%27s\\_Messiah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caesar%27s_Messiah)

<sup>99</sup> **Gandhāran Buddhist texts:**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1O3GVZ3s3sXwnzeRQpVxixDPOnxdXZ7NM/view> | <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1O3GVZ3s3sXwnzeRQpVxixDPOnxdXZ7NM/view>

<sup>100</sup> **Barbara O'Brien:** <https://www.learnreligions.com/barbara-o-brien-449479>

<sup>101</sup> Lit translation: "Live with mental qualities (dhammas) as your island, mental qualities as your refuge, with nothing else as your refuge." <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.26.o.than.html>

Buddhist temples are not places designated for the purpose of worshiping in the same sense as is religious churches, temples or synagogues, the house of God. Why not you might ask? The most salient answer is that there is no one to worship; no god, gods or saints, and no one to which prayers of forgiveness are given or where favor is requested. The Buddhist temple is not the “house of the Buddha.” They are simply buildings where the Buddhist community meets together to learn the teachings of the Buddha.

Buddhist temples did not exist during the time that the Buddha was alive. Certainly, gathering places existed, but the earliest actual temple<sup>102</sup> is said to have been built some two hundred years after the Buddha’s death<sup>103</sup>. However, it would be remiss not to mention that the mere existence of gathering places such as Buddhist temples, is enough of an element by itself to include Buddhist temples as definitive element to be called a religion in the worldview meaning.

In fact, the places where monks, nuns and community gathered when the Buddha was alive were called *maṇḍapam* (मण्डप), which meant a roofed open hall. In fact, any building for the purpose of worship of a deity was either called a *cetiyaṃ* (चैतिय) or a *devatthāna* (देवद्वान). Even during the Buddha’s time, there was a distinction made between a temple for worshipping a deity and a mere meeting hall.

Devotion, according to the Buddha, does not mean submitting oneself to the will of a God or taking refuge in an external Savior, but an ardent feeling of love and affection (*pema*) directed towards a human teacher who shows the way to freedom from dukkha (stress and suffering).

Additionally, the Buddha discouraged the wrong kind of emotional attachment to himself, as evidenced by the case recorded in the Vakkali Sutta<sup>104</sup>. Vakkali was reprimanded for his obsession with the beauty of the Buddha’s physical presence: his was a case of misplaced devotion (S.iii,119).

*“Enough Vakkali! What is there to see in this vile body? He who sees Dhamma (truth), Vakkali, sees me; he who sees me, sees Dhamma (truth). Truly seeing Dhamma (truth), one sees me; seeing me, one sees Dhamma (truth).”*

The Buddha also cautioned that ritualistic observances pose a danger; that they might be misunderstood as ends in themselves instead of being employed as means for channeling the devotional emotions into the correct path. It is when devotion is wrongly practiced that they become impediments in the form of attachments, rather than aids to understanding and knowledge. This teaching was to warn against attachment to such things, so the Buddha categorized them under the term *silabbata-paramasa*<sup>105</sup>, as one of the ten fetters (*samyojana*<sup>106</sup>), and one of the four types of clinging (*upadana*<sup>107</sup>).

<sup>102</sup> **Discovery of the Earliest Buddhist Temple:** <https://www.voanews.com/a/earliest-buddhist-shrine-discovered/1798071.html>

<sup>103</sup> **Oldest Buddhist Temple/Shrine:** <https://edition.cnn.com/2013/11/25/world/asia/buddha-birthplace-buddhist-shrine/index.html>

<sup>104</sup> **Vikkali Sutta:** <https://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn22/sn22.087x.wlsh.html>

<sup>105</sup> **Silabbata-paramasa** (see *ditṭhi kamma*) [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali\\_query.py?qs=silabbata+paramasa&matchtype=default](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?qs=silabbata+paramasa&matchtype=default) | *ditṭhi kāma*°, *silabbata*°, *attavāda*° D iii.230; the flood of false doctrine, the wilderness of groundless speculation Dhs 381, 1003, 1099, etc.; see °gata; -gaṇṭhi the web or tangle of sophistication.

<sup>106</sup> **Samyojana Pali:** संयोजन Def: “(Fetters) connection; fettering; an internal fetter.” Src: <https://accesstosight.org/tipitaka/an/an10/an10.013.than.html> | [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali\\_query.py?qs=sannojana&matchtype=default](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?qs=sannojana&matchtype=default)

<sup>107</sup> **Upadana: Pali:** उपादान Def: “Grasping; attachment; fuel; substratum by means of which an active process is kept alive or going; fuel; supply; provision; adj. (-°) supported by, drawing one’s existence from S i.69; ii 85 (aggikkhandho °assa pariyādānā by means of taking up fuel); v.284 (vāt°); J iii.342 sa-upādāna (adj.) provided with fuel S iv.399; anupādāna without fuel DhA ii.163. — 2. (appld.) “drawing upon”, grasping, holding on, grip, attachment; adj. (-°) finding one’s support by or in, clinging to, taking up, nourished by.” Src: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Up%C4%81d%C4%81na>



Correctly observed, as means and not as ends, ritualistic practices can serve to generate wholesome states of mind, while certain other rituals collectively performed can serve as a means of strengthening the social solidarity among those who share the same ideals. Therefore, in light of the exact context revealed in the Buddha's teachings, claimants would do well to be mindful of the fact that many so-called Buddhist ceremonial practices, developed centuries after the Buddha's death, and were not directly sanctioned nor taught by the Buddha.

**Claim #6:** Buddhists have the same rituals or religious services like all other world-view religions, such as, weddings and funeral services. Some claim that chanting, meditation and pilgrimage are to be included as rituals.

**Reality Check:** Initially, this claim needs clarity based on the use and meaning of the word 'ritual.' By itself, the word ritual began life around the Middle Ages (1560s), and pertained to or consisted of a rite or rites. The word stems directly from the Roman Latin *ritualis*; "relating to religious rites, from *ritus*, meaning a religious observance or ceremony.

In the 1640s, the word meant; "*prescribed manner of performing religious worship*," used in a book from the 1650s as containing the rites or ordinances of a church, and the external forms of religious or other devotional exercises."

The more common use of the word, in everyday vernacular, means something that is done in accordance with social custom or normal protocol, such as ritual handshakes. We use the word 'ritual' idiomatically when we say "my ritual morning coffee," or "my hair dyeing ritual." Idiomatically, we refer to common acts that we repeatedly do ritualistically. Ritual, in conventional common vernacular, does not inure a religious connotation although there may be some implied or inferred metaphorical meaning that some habitual action is done religiously.

For the purpose of an ontological "identicalness" test, using the word "ritual," in the religious sense in order to describe the activities of Buddhist practitioners, cannot be correctly applied. It could be used idiomatically, but not factually. This is tantamount to attaching a "religious" connotation to everything considered a ritual. In this sense: Would the act of grocery shopping every week be considered a "religious" ritual? Would the act of sitting down every month to pay your bills be considered a religious ritual? Of course not. So, what's the difference? Since there is no one to worship in Buddhism, then can the actions of Buddhists, even in temples, be considered 'religious rituals' or religious rites?

Again, we are presented with great discernibleness: *differences, non-sameness, non-identity*, which cannot be ignored. First to eliminate from the "ritual" category are chanting, meditation and pilgrimage. Chanting, in terms of the verses Buddhist bhikkhus or bhikkhunis recite, are not "worshipful" acts being rendered to the Buddha. Most, if not all Buddhist chants, are recited for the purpose of showing appreciation and giving honor to the Buddha for his accomplishment of awakening and sharing what he discovered with others. Also, unlike the World's religions, the vows of a monk or nun forbids them from asking, accepting money or charging fees for chanting, meditation, funerals or pilgrimages.

Almost any modern-day ritual religious chanting is for the purpose of invoking the favor of a God, a saint or other deity. For example, in Catholicism, this ritual chant is heard most often by priests: "*In nomine patris, et sancti, et spiritus sancti. Amen.*" Which when translated, means: In the Name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen." This is a chant invoking the Holy Trinity, which includes summoning the Sky God of Catholicism.

The Jewish religion has too many rituals to name<sup>108</sup>. In the Islamic faith, the correct invocation of Allah is outlined in the Quran (Q 7:180):

*“Call upon Him by His Names: The Generous, The Beneficent, The Munificent, The Acceptor of repentance, The Forgiver, The Powerful, The Free of Want and The Omnipotent. Call upon Him by those names, sing His praises by them, raise your hands towards Him with those supplications, and approach Him wholeheartedly.”*

The original teachings of the Buddha contain nothing remotely similar to these kinds of ritualistic worship of a God, a Supreme Being, a prophet, saints or other deities.

With regard to the inclusion of funerals representing proof of “sameness,” the publication, titled: “A Guide to a Proper Buddhist Funeral<sup>109</sup>,” states quite clearly: *“A Buddhist funeral should be solemn and dignified. It is not necessary to spend lavishly on meaningless ceremonies. Rites and rituals that contradict the Buddha’s teachings should be abandoned.”*<sup>110</sup> It is suggested that if any donor wishes to contribute to the monastery, such donation would best be wisely donated to other charitable causes.

It is highly unlikely that a funeral or wedding service in any of the 40,000 Christian denominations can be had at no cost. The cost for church services varies widely, but there is always a fee. Church wedding and funeral services vary from a base of \$500 to \$1,000. Most Buddhist temples and monasteries have no such fee structure. The most glaring difference is that a Buddhist funeral or wedding never invokes the Buddha in the same way as the World religions invoke a God or other celestial beings. *“By the authority placed upon me by God, I now pronounce you man and wife,”* is never, and will never be heard in a Buddhist temple or monastery.

With regard to the suggestion that meditation is a ritual in the same meaning as a religious ritual; no one educated in the Dhamma, would ever make such claim. A complete and convenient definition, used by those claiming that meditation is a Buddhist “ritual,” is found at Wikipedia:

*“A ritual is a sequence of activities involving gestures, words, actions, or objects, performed according to a set sequence. Rituals may be prescribed by the traditions of a community, including a religious community. Rituals are characterized, but not defined, by formalism, traditionalism, invariance, rule-governance, sacred symbolism, and performance.”*

This is a very generalized meaning of the word ritual, whereby, anything done repeatedly could be considered a ritual. While meditation may appear to fit into the definition of ‘ritual’ stated above, there is only one prescribed gesture involved in meditation; that of sitting in the lotus position with one hand cupped into the palm of the other with thumbs touching, but this is not a specific prescription. One can meditate in any position, even walking. Is meditation a tradition? The Buddha did not teach that. Rather the Buddha taught that breath meditation was how he was able to attain awakening. Meditation, according to the contextual meaning of the Pali texts, is a state of being, a state of particular consciousness, and is viewed as a tool by which the meditator uses to follow the path to enlightenment (awakening/nibbana).

Once again, the actions, gestures, and format may be generalized as a ritual, but these are not a ritual in and of themselves. Rather, these are secondary to the purpose of meditation, which is “to gain more than an intellectual understanding of impermanence associated with suffering.”

<sup>108</sup> Jewish rituals: <https://smcthejewishreligion.weebly.com/rituals-and-prayers.html>

<sup>109</sup> Guide to a Proper Buddhist Funeral: [http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf\\_file/buddhist\\_funeral.pdf](http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/buddhist_funeral.pdf)

<sup>110</sup> Guide to a Proper Buddhist Funeral: Section IV, pg. 12 ¶ 1 - [http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf\\_file/buddhist\\_funeral.pdf](http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/buddhist_funeral.pdf)

Those who chase the illusion of permanence, are also impermanent, subject to suffering, without any persistent ego-principle. This truth, liberates the Buddhist student from the delusion, thereby putting an end to both ignorance and craving,<sup>111</sup> thus we have the purpose of meditation.

Regarding Buddhist pilgrimage: On his deathbed, the Buddha told his followers about four locations that an earnest person should visit and look upon with feelings of reverence. Those four places were Lumbini, the site of the Buddha's birth; Bodhgaya, where he attained his awakening; Sarnath, where he delivered his first teaching; and Kushinagar, where he died. These instructions began a long tradition of pilgrimage among Buddhists, and these four sites now make up a pilgrimage circuit in southern Nepal and the Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh<sup>112</sup>. These aren't places of worship or prayer, but are where pays respect to the Buddha.

Unlike the worldview of religious-type pilgrimages, Buddhist pilgrimages are not for the purpose of worshipping a god, gods or saints. The underlying reason for the Buddha's suggestion certainly was not for the purposes of worshipping him, but merely set out as places of remembrance and reverence. Reverencing something or someone, is not worship, but rather an honorific. To honor what? To honor the Buddha for his achievement and his efforts to teach what he learned from his own self-awakening.

Abraham Lincoln was murdered in the Ford Theater, and this place is honored for the remembrance of the greatness of Lincoln. Does this qualify Lincoln to be a religious figure or the Ford Theater as a temple site for religious pilgrimage?

**Claim #7:** The structure and methods of practice are the same in Buddhism as in world religions.

**Reality Check:** To refute this claim is simple. To say it most succinctly, this is a false claim. Neither the structure, methods nor the practice is anything remotely like that of the World's religions. Having extensive direct experience with many different Judeo-Christian organizations, I can say with full confidence that, firstly, the Buddhist practitioner does not invoke a sense of awe with the idea of being in union with a god or a saint.

At the very top of dissimilarities is the method of practice. The Buddha's teachings focus on the individual, whether or not such individual practitioner is alone and without the convenience of a temple, monastery or monks and nuns. A place is insignificant in importance to individual practice. In other words, a temple is not necessary to gain self-awakening. We have the example of this from the Suttas, known as a *paccekabuddha*<sup>113</sup>, a person who attains enlightenment on their own, without a temple or a teacher.

Method of practice for the Buddhist is one of solitary action, and is never, has never, and will never be organizational preaching or evangelizing nor needing the intervention or assistance of a god or an intermediary representative. From the very first teaching of the Buddha to his last words before he died, the focus squarely placed the responsibility of individual practice.

In what way can Buddhist practices be equated with the Stations of the Cross, the Liturgy, the Eucharist, Confession, the ritual of Baptism, Extreme Unction, Christmas, Easter, Passover, observance of the Lord's Supper, and the ritual of the Hail Mary Rosary?

<sup>111</sup> **Meditation purpose of:** <https://accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/story/bl015.html>

<sup>112</sup> **Buddhist pilgrimage:** <https://tricycle.org/beginners/buddhism/buddhist-pilgrimage/>

<sup>113</sup> **Paccekabuddha:** Private Buddha. One who, like a Buddha, has gained Awakening without the benefit of a teacher, but who lacks the requisite store of pāramīs to teach others the practice that leads to Awakening. On attaining the goal, a paccekabuddha lives a solitary life. | <https://www.accesstoinight.org/glossary.html#pq>

Determination to practice, using meditation, reflection and contemplation, is central to the methods used by the Buddha himself. The more one studies this method of learning, which was a psychological approach oriented thus by the individual person, the more one realizes that the concept of “religion” does not apply.

There is no teaching of the Buddha that conscripts a follower to attend a church, monastery, shrine or temple. How the Buddha taught, and what he taught, clarifies that the responsibility squarely rests on the individual to follow through, and that by successfully doing so leads a person toward their own self-awakening.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, it is within the context of the Buddha’s teachings that a complete explanation of the how and the why become known by a practitioner, without superstitions or religious rituals; because Buddha said thus and such or by inference that he was the messenger carrying the instructions of some higher authority.

**Claim #8:** Buddhists are **required** to have faith in the Buddha’s teachings, even if they are not understood.

**Reality Check:** Where to begin! As was fully discussed earlier, the word faith, given the meaning with regard to the World’s religions, cannot rightly be applied considering the Buddha’s use and meaning of the word *saddha*<sup>114</sup>. In the Judeo-Christian religions, faith, in the theological sense, is purported to be a particular spiritual perception of invisible objects of religious veneration. In other words, belief is founded on such spiritual perception. In all biblical texts, at Hebrews 11:1<sup>115</sup>, appears the definition of faith.

Another, more conventional dictionary meaning of faith, states that it is the assent of the mind to the truth of a proposition or statement for which there is no complete evidence. In other words, absolute belief in a concept that can produce no proof. Specifically, firm belief based upon confidence in the authority and veracity of another, rather than upon one’s own knowledge, reason, or experience.

Compare this concept with the meaning of the Pali word *saddha*, which means a confidence-based belief born out of direct experience resulting in knowledge and understanding of the efficacy of the Buddha’s teachings gained through experience. Given the meaning of *saddha*, it is truly incredulous that one would claim that Buddhists are ‘required’ to have faith, even if they do not understand the teachings. If one does not understand the teachings then how is one to know whether or not they are true? Evidently, this is the condition that causes certain people to make the claim that Buddhism is a religion. For over forty years the Buddha taught *dukkha*—suffering, dissatisfaction, and stress. What is not to understand? Someone making such a claim clearly does not have even a cursory knowledge of the Buddha’s teachings.

Buddha’s first teaching, known as the Four Noble Truths, is extremely forthright and utterly simple. The teaching states that: 1) There is suffering. 2) There is a cause of suffering. 3) There is a way to end suffering. 4) There are eight things one can do to eradicate suffering and become awakened to the truth about the nature of reality. All eight things are extremely simple, and common-sensical. There are right ways and wrong ways of acting, thinking, speaking, livelihood, effort, mindfulness and concentration. All of these things are contextually in line with the first three truths, suffering and the end of suffering.

<sup>114</sup> *Saddha: Pali: सद्धा* Def: “Credible, belief, believed to be, confidence of credibility.” Src: [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali\\_query.py?page=675](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?page=675)

<sup>115</sup> *Hebrews 11:1*: Src: <https://biblehub.com/hebrews/11-1.htm>

Additionally, the Buddha never said that those desiring to follow his teachings were under obligation to have faith, blind or otherwise, in order to benefit. Furthermore, if a follower does not understand a teaching, it is up to the individual to learn the actual meaning of a teaching; either through self-examination or by employing a person known to be wise with regard to having direct experience with the results of the same teaching.

There is no nor has there ever been any sort of suggestion by the Buddha that a follower must have faith in the teachings. Faith, belief or confidence in the teachings, develops only from direct experience by applying the teachings. In this way the practitioner gains an understanding because of their own direct experience. Obviously, as is true with any kind of learning, such as chemistry or mathematics, one proves for themselves that a certain proposition or equation is true or untrue.

Additionally, the word translated as 'faith' in the Pali texts (सिद्धि) has multiple meanings, depending on the context in which it is used. While the word *saddha* is commonly translated as 'faith,' the actual meaning of the word is 'belief' or 'to believe.'

For example: "The axiom of the rebirth process is not to be taken as a tenet, such as is the case with the Ten Commandments. It is up to oneself to examine and accept or reject that concept. Even a Buddha cannot "force anyone to believe" in anything. Thus, there is a difference in what is meant by "faith" in Buddha Dhamma, compared to the tenets and doctrine of theistic religions. In any theistic religion, one has to accept the idea of a Creator without question; it is the only foundation of all major theistic religions, and is the only path to salvation from the effects of sin.<sup>116</sup>"

Conversely, the Buddha taught that belief only develops through direct practice, and through direct practice is one able to see the full value and meaning of the Dhamma (truth). Therefore, one gains confidence in his teachings through direct experience, not faith. In this way only, could the practitioner gain *saddha* (belief).

**Claim #9:** Inclusion of cultural holidays and "beliefs" warrants proof positive that the teachings of the Buddha should be considered a religion in the worldview meaning.

**Reality Check:** Once again, here we have a case of sweeping generalizations. It is not completely understandable what is meant by the inclusion of the word 'beliefs' specifically. As is the case here, most claimants, with a superficial knowledge of Buddhist practices, tend to generalize certain words used by the Buddha. More often than not, an uninformed claimant will use an English word that already has a general, conventional connotation, the meaning of which changes depending on the context in which it is used, and the word 'belief' is one such word.

However, if beliefs were the only thing delineating whether something qualifies as a religion in the world-view sense, then the beliefs of U.S. Democratic parties could be considered religions. Science too would have a lion's share of the label of a 'religion' for all of their beliefs, such as the religion of Physics, then Quantum Physics, Philosophy, Genetics, the religion of Cosmology, and so on.

As previously mentioned, claimants would do well to be mindful of the fact that many so-called Buddhist ceremonial practices developed centuries after the Buddha's death, and these were not directly sanctioned, taught nor suggested by the Buddha. This holds true for many modern Buddhist holidays developed over the centuries, which are highly influenced by culture.

<sup>116</sup> **Pinnaduwaage, Dr. Lal Ariyaratna** *Quote:* <https://puredhamma.net/dhamma-and-philosophy/buddha-dhamma-buddhism-religion/>



Mahayana rituals and ceremonies are examples, such as in the Tibetan culture, which many Westerners are exposed to. These serve as generalized fodder for this claim. However, with regard to cultural holidays; if what is meant by this claim is that Buddhists celebrate the holidays of religious origin, this is utterly false. This claim, in essence, is comparable to making the claim that if an atheist or agnostic observes Christmas, hides eggs and candy for children in April, then they are Christians.

The only official Buddhist holidays, if one could call them such, is the observance of Vesakha Puja<sup>117</sup>, the day of the Buddha's birth. Also, is the observance of Kathina (kah-thee-nah), which is not a holiday or ritual for the purpose of invoking the Buddha, but for presentation of new robes to monks and nuns.

The Buddha only suggested that students, monks and nuns, observe certain days or times of the year, but not for the purpose of worshipping either himself, any religious object, deity or any person. Whatever modern cultural holidays exist in Buddhism, these are the creations of people, and were not conscripted nor taught by the Buddha.

Followers of the various Mahayana schools, observe many more so-called holidays, such as the birthday of bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (also known as Guanyin), Ullambana, and Hungry Ghost Day.

Theravada Buddhists observe far fewer holidays<sup>118</sup>. However, most of these events are not holidays in the world-view sense of what constitutes a religious holy day, such as Christmas, Easter, Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Pentecost, and Advent<sup>119</sup>, which are specific to worshipping or invoking a god, gods or saints. According to the Theravada school, such theistic ideas originate out of false ego-belief<sup>120</sup>. The Theravada school reiterates the teaching of the Buddha, who stated:

*"Theistic ideas and overall organized religion have the potential to drive someone insane, thus causing fanaticism or self-harm."*

*[It may be of some interest that the name 'Theravada' in Pali, literally means "school of the elder teachers." It is the branch of Buddhism that uses the teaching of the Pāli Canon, a collection of the oldest recorded Buddhist texts, as its core source of the Buddha's teachings. As a whole, the Theravada school considers that if some tenet or teaching does not appear in the Pali texts, then the Buddha did not teach it.]*

The immense difference between religious holidays and the observances of Buddhists, is that none of the Buddhist observance days are for the purpose of prayer to a God, Jesus, Mary, prophets or saints. Once again, we find that there is no ontological "sameness." The ontological discernibleness is discovered in the context of Buddhist observances, which purposes are entirely opposite that of world-view religious holy days.

Of the three main branches of Buddhism, Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana, it is only within the practices of the Mahayana branches that we see more commonality with the various World religious observances.

<sup>117</sup> Vesakha Puja: Pali: वसक्रांति (vesakha) पूजा (puja) Def: "Name of the month Vesak: April/May; homage; to be honoured; honorable."

Src: [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?qs=p%C5%ABja&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact)

[bin/app/pali\\_query.py?qs=p%C5%ABja&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact](https://en.dhammadownload.com/activities/visakha-puja-vesak-day/)<https://en.dhammadownload.com/activities/visakha-puja-vesak-day/>

<sup>118</sup> Theravadin Buddhist Observance Days: <http://factsanddetails.com/asian/cat64/sub415/entry-2817.html>

<sup>119</sup> Christian Holy Days: <https://www.dummies.com/religion/christianity/christian-holy-days-holidays-and-seasons/>

<sup>120</sup> Theravada/Mahayana differences: [https://www.diffen.com/difference/Mahayana\\_vs\\_Theravada](https://www.diffen.com/difference/Mahayana_vs_Theravada)

Mahayana branches frequently pray to various Buddhist saints, such as Avalokiteshvara, Shanti deva, Milarepa, Longchenpa, and Tsongkhapa, to name a few. All of these so-called saints however, were actual people who contributed many commentary texts to Mahayana Buddhism<sup>121</sup> over many years, centuries after the Buddha's death.

Again, the Buddha did not suggest nor sanction these practices, which were adopted and developed many-many centuries after the Buddha's death. Therefore, these are completely the invention of people who, for one reason or another, desired to honor these particularly notable personages.

The Theravada school recognizes the Pali texts (Tipitaka) as the sole authority for the teachings of the Buddha, which are considered to be the closest to the actual words spoken by him. Scholars consider the Theravadin school to be the purest form of Buddhism. "The name Theravāda comes from "Sthāvīriya" (meaning elders); one of the early Buddhist schools from which Theravadins trace their descent."<sup>122</sup>

"According to adherents' accounts, the Theravāda school derives from the vibhajjāvāda ("doctrine of analysis") group, which was a division of the Sthāvira tradition that arose during the putative Third Buddhist council held around 250 BCE (BC) under the patronage of Indian Emperor Ashoka<sup>123</sup>." The origin of the Mahayana school of Buddhism, is something of a mystery.

The historical record shows it emerging as a distinctive school during the 1st and 2nd centuries CE (AD)<sup>124</sup>. This timeframe is 250 years between the formation of the Theravadin and Mahayana schools. The Mahayana school was not formed until some 488 years after the Buddha's death (487 BCE/BC)<sup>125</sup>.

**Claim #10:** Of course, how could a claim that Buddhism is the same as the World's religions be complete without the claim that Buddhism, includes heavenly beings, supernatural beings, gods, and demons? Various claimants of this argument include people who have achieved a certain level of self-awakening called Bodhisattas (Pali) (Bodhisattvas *Sanskrit*), which, as will be explained, is utterly incorrect.

**Reality Check:** It is common knowledge that the human concept of otherworldly beings has existed since recorded history. This is not a new concept. A civilization that is most often cited for its depiction of the netherworld and otherworldly beings is ancient Egypt. The concepts of heavenly realms, resurrection, ascension, sin, and immaculate conception, are not specific to the Judeo-Christian religions, but existed long before even the ancient Hebrew peoples.

Many researchers in Egyptology credit the ancient Egyptians for the template of Jesus birth<sup>126</sup>, death and resurrection. The Jesus story is identical to the immaculate conception, birth, death and resurrection of the Egyptian god Horus, thousands of years before the time when Jesus was said to exist<sup>127</sup>.

<sup>121</sup> **Mahayana saintss:** <https://www.beliefnet.com/faiths/buddhism/2000/06/the-saints-of-the-dharma.aspx>

<sup>122</sup> **History of Theravada school:** [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Therav%C4%81da\\_Buddhism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Therav%C4%81da_Buddhism)

<sup>123</sup> **Theravada School timeframe:** [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Theravāda\\_Buddhism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Theravāda_Buddhism)

<sup>124</sup> **Origin of Mahayana:** Barbara O'Brian: <https://www.learnreligions.com/origins-of-mahayana-buddhism-450007>

<sup>125</sup> **Buddha birth/death date:** <https://imp.center/i/gautama-buddha-birth-date-death-date-276/>

<sup>126</sup> **Ancient Egypt, the Light of the World** Massey, Gerald: Src:

<https://books.google.com/books?id=t00XAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA752#v=onepage&q&f=false>

<sup>127</sup> Massey, Gerald "The Historical Jesus and Mythical Christ": <https://archive.org/details/historicaljesusm00massuoft/page/12/mode/2up> | <https://archive.org/details/historicaljesusm00gera>

In the last ten years or so, many archaeologists and historians have discovered the ancient Egyptian roots of Judeo-Christian religions, and in particular Christianity<sup>128</sup>.

With regard to the teachings of the Buddha, there are many different realms where beings, not of the Earth, reside. In our modern time, people are not amenable to belief in such things. The concepts of spirit or otherworldly beings have disintegrated over time due to the misuse and abuse of this concept by many religious entities throughout history.

Scattered throughout the Pali texts are the records of the Buddha's encounter with certain devas. In the Pali language the word 'deva' simply means 'bright' or 'shining.' However, the Buddha also mentioned many realms of existence, other than the Earth.

Upon examination of the instances when the Buddha mentions other plains of existence and devas, one begins to see a marked differentiation between the world-view concept of such things as gods, spirits, angels, demons, and so on. Expansion on this topic could fill volumes. Therefore, the following is a brief explanation of the content of the Pali texts regarding this subject.

The first glaring difference between the world-view characteristics of such otherworldly beings of the Judeo-Christian mythology, is that in Buddhism devas are not immortal. As with all beings, regardless of realm, devas die and are reborn. The Suttas state that devas live very long lives, but for finite periods of time. When a deva dies, they are reborn as some other sort of being, perhaps a different type of deva, perhaps a human or something beyond human comprehension.

Unlike world-view concepts of such beings, devas do not create or shape the world. Just as it is true with humans, devas come into existence based upon their past karmas (*Sanskrit-karma*), which means that they are as much subject to the natural laws of conditions, causes and effects as any other being in the universe. Devas are not incarnations of a few archetypal deities or manifestations of a god or gods. Neither are devas merely symbols; as they are considered to be like humans, distinct individuals with their own personalities and paths in life.

An important characteristic of devas is that they are not omniscient, omnipotent, all-seeing or all-knowing. Their knowledge is inferior to that of a fully enlightened Buddha, and they especially lack awareness of beings in worlds higher than their own. Like humans, their powers are limited to their own worlds. Unlike certain Judeo-Christian entities, devas have no influence on human beings.

It may surprise some readers to know that according to the texts, devas are not morally perfect. Some devas lack human passions and desires, but some of them are capable of ignorance, arrogance and pride. Of the many deva worlds, there are those devas that experience the same kind of passions that humans do, including, lust, jealousy, and anger. It is indeed these cravings in the mental and moral realms that cause certain devas to be subject to the conditions of kamma and rebirth.

The realms and lives of the devas however, are not equal to the refuge one takes in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. While some devas may be beings of great moral authority and prestige, and thus deserving of a high degree of respect, no deva realm can ultimately be taken as the way of escape from saṃsāra nor control one's rebirth. The highest honors are reserved to the Three Jewels of Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha<sup>129</sup>.

<sup>128</sup> Ossman, Ahmed Archaeologist/Historian "Christianity: An Ancient Egyptian Religion": <https://youtu.be/H3ag9BO2--s?t=107> |

<sup>129</sup> Devas: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deva\\_\(Buddhism\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deva_(Buddhism))

Buddha understood that most human beings are limited to a kind of mundane thinking, he therefore didn't advocate or encourage contemplation or speculation about such things as other realms of existence or of beings such as devas. Buddha knew that some things were naturally unfathomable and unreachable by mere conceptual thought. This is why, regardless of whether being asked about the infinite nature of the Universe or whether the "self" existed, and so on, the Buddha redirected the focus of such questions that to know the answers was inconsequential with regard to ending one's suffering and awakening.

With regard to the inclusion of Bodhisattas (Pali) (*Bodhisattva*-Sanskrit) as beings other than human, in a god sense: A thorough examination of the Pali Suttas and Sanskrit Sutras determining the state of being of a Bodhisatta, is unnecessary, for a clear description is easily obtained. Only a human being who has achieved self-awakening can be a Buddha<sup>130</sup>, for it is a state of being that separates a Buddha from an Arahant or a Bodhisatta, the latter of which can destine themselves to become a Paccekabuddha<sup>131</sup>.

According to all of the Buddha's teachings recorded in the Tipitaka, as well as later commentaries, none of these states of being, even that of a Buddha, are considered other-worldly beings in a god sense. A Bodhisatta is a human being, and is not a fully awakened person, as was taught by the Buddha in the Majjhima, Aṅguttara, and Saṃyutta Nikāyas.

*"Monks, before my awakening, I was yet merely the Bodhisatta [Sanskrit: bodhisattva], not fully-awakened."*

In the same way that a Buddha attains self-awakening (awakening/nibbana), so too follow Arahants (arhats), and Bodhisattas. The Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi explains this beautifully:

The Buddha sought:

*"...a way to liberation from life's afflictions — and as he tells it, he seeks liberation primarily for himself, not with some grand thought in mind of saving the world. He goes forth, becomes an ascetic, and engages in a relentless struggle for deliverance. Finally, he finds the correct path and attains the bliss of nibbana (Sanskrit-nirvāṇa). After his attainment, he considers whether he should make the path available to others, and his first impulse is to remain silent. Note that he almost follows the route of a paccekabuddha."*

*His major achievement is to have attained nibbana; the state free from all bondage and suffering. This is the great goal, the final end of all spiritual (psychic/mental) striving; the peace beyond all the anxiety and unrest of the ordinary human condition. By teaching the path, he makes this goal available to others, and those who follow the path reach the same goal that he himself attained.*<sup>132</sup>

A cursory perusal of the earliest Pali texts, right down to modern commentaries, there is no reference of Arahants or Bodhisattas as being anything more than humans who have gained extraordinary knowledge and wisdom through practice and direct experience. Again, we can see how a claim that the teachings of the Buddha contain the mention of "other-worldly" beings, while seeming similar to worldview religions, utilize this similarity in a like-by-like comparison. Yet, upon close examination of the Buddha's words and the context in which they are used, there is no identical sameness to be had.

<sup>130</sup> **Becoming a Buddha:** "The Anguttara Nikaya of the Theravada teaches that a Buddha alone has the excellent attributes unique to himself." | [http://www.ahandfulofleaves.org/documents/Articles/The Bodhisattva Ideal of Theravada\\_JIABS\\_Ratnayaka\\_1985.pdf](http://www.ahandfulofleaves.org/documents/Articles/The%20Bodhisattva%20Ideal%20of%20Theravada_JIABS_Ratnayaka_1985.pdf)

<sup>131</sup> **Paccekabuddha:** Pali: पचकबुद्ध Def: "Single, by oneself, separate, one enlightened by himself, i. e. one who has attained to the supreme and perfect insight, but dies without proclaiming their awakening." Src: [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali\\_query.py?qs=pacceka&searchhws=yes](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?qs=pacceka&searchhws=yes)

<sup>132</sup> **Bodhisatta/Arahants:** Bodhi, Bhikkhu <https://accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/arhantsbodhisattvas.html>

So, applying ontological methods, no “sameness,” “identicalness,” meaning indiscernibleness, can be made.

The Buddha questioned many of the assumptions existing in his society, including moral ones, and developed a teaching with ethics based upon reason and compassion rather than tradition, superstitions and taboo.

In the famous Kalama Sutta he says that revelation (*anussana*), tradition (*parampara*), the authority of the writings (*pitakasampada*) and one's own point of view (*ditthinijjhanakkhanti*), are inadequate means of determining what is right and wrong, correct and incorrect.

**Claim #11:** Another popular claim is that Buddhists have “scripture” comparable to that of the World's religions, which are related to future Buddhas.

**Reality Check:** Here, again, we are presented with the importance of the meaning and context of a word. The earlier claim that; simply because the word “religion” did not exist in the Buddha's time, does not disqualify Buddhism from being called a religion.

The essence of that claim is the same as the comparison of the Buddha's written words to “*religious scripture*.” This claim is merely an inference or transference of the modern meaning of the word “scripture.” Neither the word “scripture” nor the context of this word existed when the Buddha was alive. Yet, application of the word “scripture” is applied. The basis for this claim is that the nature of the Pali texts infers the Tipitaka to be “religious.”

The word ‘scripture,’ according to every modern authority, defines it as a reference to the writings contained in the Bible. Although existing from ancient Roman times, the etymology of the word finds that it was used in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century to indicate the sacred writings of the Bible. The root origin of the word comes from the ancient Latin<sup>133</sup> root *scriptus*<sup>134</sup>, meaning “to write.”

In the Pali Tipitaka, the word *pavacana*<sup>135</sup> means “word,” specifically the word of the Buddha. There is no inference in the Pali text indicating that the Buddha's words are “holy scripture.” While the words of the Buddha are indeed considered important, and critical for the process of gaining a self-awakened state, there is no indication of “religiosity” inferred.

What is the difference between the words of the Buddha, as recorded in the Tipitaka, and the words of the various personages of the Holy Bible, the Koran, the Zoroastrian Avesta or the Jewish Torah? All of the aforementioned texts were purportedly delivered to humankind by a god. Additionally, the words in the aforementioned religious texts define various punishments, and torments, if the words of the god(s), in the form of commandments and edicts, are not followed.

A most glaring difference between the words of the Buddha and the World's religious scripture, is that the teachings are not revealed via a second or third party. All religious “scripture” is revealed through some intermediary. Conversely, the Buddha's words came directly from the Buddha himself. Buddha's words (*pavacana*) do not dispense edicts of punishment for displeasing him or mete out fateful destinies for not living up to his teachings. As indicated clearly throughout the Tipitaka, every human being is responsible for their own actions, and each is the architect of their own future.

<sup>133</sup> **Scripture etymology:** Borrowed from Latin *scriptūra* (“a writing, scripture”), from *scriptum*, the supine of *scribō* (“I write”). | <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/scripture>

<sup>134</sup> **Scripture:** Etymology: Src: <https://www.etymonline.com/word/scripture>

<sup>135</sup> *Pavacana* Pali: पावचन Def: “a word, esp. the word of the Buddha D i,88; S ii.259; Th 1, 587; 2, 457.” [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali\\_query.py?qs=p%C4%81vacana&searchhws=yes](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?qs=p%C4%81vacana&searchhws=yes)



So, in the most literal sense, the Buddha's recorded words (*pavacana*), are merely scriptura, in the contextual meaning of even the ancient Latin word "scriptura," meaning "words" or "writing."

In school, children learn longhand script. The application of the word script or scriptura (writing) does not make something written in longhand a religious text. What is it then that constitutes a religious text? One source defines religious text as: "*Writing that is venerated for the worship of a deity*"<sup>136</sup>. This is a clear, succinct, no frills definition of what constitutes a religious writing.

The Buddha is not a deity; therefore, his recorded words are not those of a god. Neither are his teachings disseminated or revealed through a prophet. Given these indisputable evidences along with the fact that the texts of all of the World's religions are revealed through prophets, Buddha's recorded words cannot be considered religious text. Again, we have an ontological opposite, therefore not the same.

**Claim #12:** The following claim is a bit far reaching. The claim is that analysis of the philosophy of the Buddha qualifies Buddhism as a religion.

**Reality Check:** This claim is difficult to resolve because of its wide generalization. Who is analyzing the Pali texts? Which Pali texts are being analyzed? What are the criteria for such an examination? Does this claim infer the idea that anyone, of any persuasion and discipline, would discover some blatant and glaring reason that would naturally lead one to the conclusion that Buddhism is a religion?

This claim is certainly a generic one, and generics express generalizations. However, unlike quantifiable statements, generics do not carry information about how many elements of the kind or category contain the same properties. The claim is too broad to employ the use of ontology for the purpose of determining indiscernibility.

Generics are not equivalent in meaning to any quantifying determiners such as "all", "some", or "most." Are "*all*" of the Pali texts being examined? Are some of the Pali texts being examined in this claim, and if so, which ones? Perhaps those making this claim do so on the basis of mere inference.

It is highly unlikely, given the inaccuracy of the claims already mentioned, that a claimant has researched all 84,000 teachings of the Buddha, and has an in-depth knowledge and contextual understanding of the Pali language, let alone direct personal experience with higher achievements such as the *jhanas*.

Additionally, this generalization includes too many variables in order to prove whether or not the claim is a true one. Therefore, the claim is an unwarranted generalization. An unwarranted generalization in Philosophy is known as a fallacy<sup>137</sup>.

A fallacy occurs when a generalization is based on insufficient evidence, and exists when two competing conceptions are false, but popular beliefs infer one or both to be true. But, inherently, fallacies are deceptively bad arguments. Fallacies occur, when either one sample or both are unrepresentative to support the generalization. Being able to detect and avoid fallacies has been viewed as a supplement to criteria of good reasoning.

<sup>136</sup> **Religious Text:** Src: <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/religious+text>

<sup>137</sup> **Fallacies:** Src: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/fallacies/>

Therefore, if this claim were true, it would support inductive logic<sup>138</sup>, which is the process of building generalized hypotheses using direct examples that serve as evidence. A generalized claim such as this, without supporting evidence thus causes it to be a fallacy.

An examination of the relation between the teachings of the Buddha, and all other World religions, calls for comparative, ontological analysis, and deductive logic to be applied. However, for such a comparative analysis to be viable, instead of sweeping generalizations, a point-by-point study of the Buddha's teachings would require an understanding of the context of those teachings, and a knowledge of the Pali language.

Likewise, the main source of teachings, dogma and doctrine of all World religions would necessitate and require the same examination. Such a comparison would require philosophical; generical, heuristic<sup>139</sup>, philological, and etymological analysis. Such claims as this, more often than not, are made based on the loose application of theoretical Hermeneutics<sup>140</sup>, as opposed to a methodological approach.

**Claim #13:** Because the Buddha taught so long ago, modern age people have no way of confirming whether or not the Buddha's teachings are even true, regardless of the fact that the Buddha himself said that one should verify this for themselves.

**Reality Check:** Should this claim also be extended to every entity and personage responsible for the writings of all the World's religions, given that they were all written centuries ago? Why then believe in anything at all? This is the nihilist's approach. This claim can then, and should be applied to the words of every scholar, politician, philosopher, mathematician, scientist, physician, *ad infinitum*, who lived centuries before our Age.

This highly hypothetical claim, which infers some consensual universality, would mean that, for example, since the writers of the U.S. Constitution lived so long ago we cannot make the claim that anything they said or wrote is true. Should we discount the mathematically relevant discoveries of Euclid, Pythagoras, and Archimedes, merely because they lived so long ago? Why haven't we? Because, like the Buddha, human beings have confirmed the validity of the discoveries of such persons for centuries.

<sup>138</sup> **Inductive Logic:** Def: "Inductive logic is a logic of evidential support. In a deductive logic, the premises of a valid deductive argument logically entail the conclusion, where logical entailment means that every logically possible state of affairs that makes the premises true must make the conclusion true as well. Thus, the premises of a valid deductive argument provide total support for the conclusion. An inductive logic extends this idea to weaker arguments. In a good inductive argument, the truth of the premises provides some degree of support for the truth of the conclusion." Src: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/logic-inductive/>

<sup>139</sup> **Heuristics** (Linguistic Heuristic Analysis): Def: "Deriving from the Ancient Greek word meaning "to discover," heuristic analysis is an approach to discovery, learning and problem-solving that uses rules, estimates or educated guesses to find a satisfactory solution to a specific issue." Src: <https://www.forcepoint.com/cyber-edu/heuristic-analysis> | [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/278675788\\_Multiple\\_Correspondence\\_Analysis\\_as\\_heuristic\\_tool\\_to\\_unveil\\_confounding\\_variables\\_in\\_corpus\\_linguistics](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/278675788_Multiple_Correspondence_Analysis_as_heuristic_tool_to_unveil_confounding_variables_in_corpus_linguistics)

<sup>140</sup> **Hermeneutics:** Def: "Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation. Hermeneutics plays a role in a number of disciplines whose subject matter demands interpretative approaches, characteristically, because the disciplinary subject matter concerns the meaning of human intentions, beliefs, and actions, or the meaning of human experience as it is preserved in the arts and literature, historical testimony, and other artifacts. Traditionally, disciplines that rely on hermeneutics include theology, especially Biblical studies, jurisprudence, and medicine, as well as some of the human sciences, social sciences, and humanities. For example, in theology, Biblical hermeneutics concerns the general principles for the proper interpretation of the Bible. Src: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermeneutics/>

Truly, if this claim is valid, then no modern human being can rely on anything said or written within a certain timeframe or particular historical Age. Since the writings of Plato, Aristotle and Socrates, which are the foundational basis for Western thought and culture, lived so many years ago, all human beings should assume that nothing any of these philosophers said or wrote is true or valid. Additionally, consider then, what provides faith in the U.S. Constitution? Is it not the practical application of the tenets therein that prove them to be worthy of confidence by the people, of the people, for the people?

Perhaps, since the Constitution and Declaration of Independence were written so long ago, by people that have no relationship to modern-day citizens; should we not simply throw them out; disassociate ourselves from the philosophy of these documents? Why does one claim have value and another have none?

The claim is clearly based on inductive thinking. An inductive thinking process is referred to as “generalizing” because it means that one begins with specific details or facts and progresses to a general principle as a conclusion.

Therefore, induction functions as the opposite to deduction. Further, inductive generalizing is based on probability, not certainty. Inductive arguments claim that it’s likely (but not logically necessary) that if the premises are all true then so is the conclusion. Thus, if inductive process is used accurately, the best that can be said is that its conclusions are probably valid.



There is an old idiom that criticizes a person as one who “can’t see the forest for the trees.”<sup>141</sup> This idiom explains the fact that a person’s perspective is limited, that they

are unable to discern the scope and extent of the whole thing as long as they persist in focusing upon one detail of the whole. Of late, with regard to persons who focus on a single fact or element of COVID virus; believing that the virus is a recent occurrence, are ignorant of the fact that the virus was first discovered in 1933.

Additionally, this claim supports the concept and perception of stereotyping, which is also inductive thinking. Although stereotyping is an application of inductive thinking, it is an inaccurate misuse of the “details to generalization” process. Stereotyping happens because it is easy and convenient, and mimics logic, but never provides a valid conclusion. A stereotype is created by quickly and ignorantly assuming that details of a part correctly apply to the whole.

So, with regard to the part of the claim that “despite” the Buddha’s suggestion; that one not accept any assumed or forgone conclusion based on various sources, takes the entire corpus of the Buddha’s teachings completely out of context.

Once again, we have a gross generalization, which assumes the theistic requirement of faith is also true of Buddhism. Regarding the Buddha’s words, in that one should not accept his teachings based on blind faith, is not an example of the Buddha requiring faith. In this regard, the Buddha’s words to the Kalamas people is apropos:

<sup>141</sup> Can’t see the forest for the trees. *Idiom Def.*: “Cannot see, understand, or focus on a situation in its entirety due to being preoccupied with minor details.”

*"Don't go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by writings, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, 'This contemplative is our teacher.' When you know for yourselves that, 'These qualities are skillful; these qualities are blameless; these qualities are praised by the wise; these qualities, when adopted and carried out, lead to welfare and to happiness' — then you should enter and remain in them.' Thus, was it said."<sup>142</sup>*

This claim cannot be verified, wholly due to the fact that the Buddha clearly stated: *"When you know for yourselves..."* meaning that each individual can only verify the veracity of his teachings based on one's own direct personal experience by application of his teachings.

The Buddha is saying that the proof of his statements is completely experiential, which to note: *precedes* the development of confidence, not the other way around, as it is written in Christian Bibles at Hebrews 11:1, which asks disciples, and adherents to have blind faith in something that is never seen, but can only be hoped for. This would be like someone simply reading the Eightfold Noble Path and believing that by reading it they gain hope that the teaching would somehow osmose into them, thus saving themselves from their own actions, which creates their own suffering.

This principle is altogether opposite of the tenets, dogma and doctrine of every theist-based religion, which infers that words or statements issued from a "god" or "gods," and delivered via prophets, requires faith in that the words or statements of such gods are true; without a shred of empirical proof as to whether the doctrines, edicts, commandments or philosophy is sound and actually works. Since there are no means by which a follower of a theistic-based religion can prove even the existence of a god or gods, then the premise that whatever a god states is true, is invalid.

Perhaps, if one making the claim that the Buddha requires faith, were to read the initial statement made by the Buddha, they might realize that the context of the Buddha's teaching infers nothing like blind faith at all.

*"Don't go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture (writings), by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability..."*

Is it not rational to conclude that there is no evidence, by any standard of comparative examination, that the Buddha's statement in the Kalama Sutta is proof validating Buddhism as a religion in the world-view sense.

It would appear as though the Buddha himself has knowledge of the meaning of the word scripture, based merely on the translation of the Pali word *pavacana*. However, the use of the word "scripture" is a translator's choice. The word being translated as the word "scripture," is the Pali word *pavacana*, which as mentioned earlier merely means "word" or "words." The use of the modern word 'scripture' is purely a translator's decision based on common concepts to relay the meaning of *pavacana*.

## What is Real?



The word 'real' is derived from the Latin word "*res*"<sup>143</sup>, which is often translated as 'thing'. The word 'thing,' is often used in ontological discourse as if "the thing" [the object], had a presupposed meaning, which does not need an explicit philosophical definition because it belongs to ordinary language.

<sup>142</sup> **Kalama Sutta:** Anguttara Nikaya 3.61: <https://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.065.than.html>

<sup>143</sup> **Res Latin-Meaning:** <http://latindictionary.wikidot.com/noun:res>

Comparing the teachings of the Buddha to the tenets, dogma, and theism of the worldview definition of what constitutes a religion, cannot be a one-category ontology, because the fundamental elemental entities do not belong to the same category. A determination to categorize the teachings of the Buddha within the worldview definition of religion, using the criteria of common or ordinary language, is utterly flawed. Additionally, Buddhism is not a 'thing' in the same manner as is implied by the casual label "religion."

Using such a label casually, given the broad meaning of the word "religion" to identify the teachings of the Buddha as such, merely employs common language as a means of inclusion, without the necessity for an explicit philosophical, ontological or philological definition. Aside from the application of such mechanisms of proof, application of the casual meaning of the word "religion" completely excludes direct experience.

### **Etymology: Meaning and origin of the word 'religion.'**

The Latin word religion itself is a relatively new word, considering the timeframe since the Buddha of some 2,600 years. However, digging ever deeper for support of their claims, there are those who say that because the word 'religion' did not exist in the Buddha's time, [inserting this fact into their argument], insist that it is a sound conclusion that a world view of what a religion is, did not exist during the time of the Buddha. Therefore, the concept of religion, as a thing, in ontological terms, was not understood then as it is today.

Using the fact that the Latin word 'religion' did not exist during the time of the Buddha, is a thin veil for making the claim that the Buddha was ignorant of the concepts of religion as a thing; a system, a concept or set of ideals.

So, conversely, using this etymological argument conflicts with the parameters of modern-day usage, because the Judeo-Christian religions also did not exist during the time of the Buddha. How can these comparative criteria even be valid? Ontologically speaking, these can't. Neither has anything in common with the other, therefore there is no ontological basis to make the claim of indiscernibility or identicalness.

Comparing theistic Judeo-Christian systems to the Buddha's teaching's has serious flaws. Application of modern socio-political, cultural, linguistic, philosophical ideas and concepts, did not exist during the time that the Buddha lived. Once an ontological perspective is understood, these sorts of criteria, for the purpose of a comparative study, becomes theoretical and at best suspect.

**For example:** Comparing the Buddha's hesitancy of ordaining women in his time, to the modern concepts of women's liberation and political correctness is a non-sequitur<sup>144</sup>. Using common-language-meaning as an instrument for proof, could then mean that it could be said that the Buddha was a misogynist. Again, with regard to the word 'religion,' common language usage entangles the elements of almost any system based on beliefs and faith, particularly if such includes a central god-figure or other supernatural entities.

<sup>144</sup> **Non-sequitur:** Def: "1. An inference that does not follow from the premises specifically: A fallacy resulting from a simple conversion of a universal affirmative proposition or from the transposition of a condition and its consequent 2: A statement (such as a response) that does not follow logically from or is not clearly related to anything previously said Src: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/non%20sequitur>

When the Buddha was alive, the following predominant belief systems existed: Brahmanas (Brahmins), who were the orthodox practitioners of the Upanishads, believing in the creator god Brahma. Next, the Shramanas, who were wandering mendicant spiritual seekers. Next, the Ajivika school founded by Gosala, who rejected the causal process of kamma and believed in the existence of a soul. Next, the Lokayata (Charvaka school), founded by Lokachakshu, rejecting kamma and rebirth; the sole aim of life was focusing as much sensual pleasure as possible, rejecting all forms of logic as a valid way of knowing anything. Next, Ajnana School of Agonistics, led by Sanjayin who rejected logic or philosophical speculation as the basis for knowing anything.

Does not the mere mention of these “other” systems of belief in the Pali texts, not indicate that the Buddha knew the difference between what he was teaching, compared to all the rest? His teachings indicate that he had a good understanding and knowledge of the various religious sects in existence, including those that are today considered religions, such as Hinduism or Jainism. Given the criteria of whether a belief system is a religion or not, if the Buddha were alive today, without doubt he would disavow all the belief systems that rely on blind faith, the existence of a human soul, and the concept of an omniscient being.

This fairly well covers the entire field of systems considered to be ‘religions’ by modern-day common worldview standards. The very fact that the Buddha disavowed those belief systems during his time, strongly indicates that he would do the same today.

Before his awakening (enlightenment), the Bodhisatta Siddhartha Gautama studied with two teachers, Alara Kalama<sup>145</sup> and Uddaka Ramaputta<sup>146</sup>. Both teachers were of the Brahminic tradition. These taught him to achieve absorbed concentration on nothingness, and on neither distinguishing nor not distinguishing anything.

However, Siddhartha was dissatisfied with these attainments, so he left these teachers. He then undertook a regimen of extreme austerities, eating almost nothing. Again, he discovered that such practices did not lead to liberation, rejecting the common world-views of the time. None of the various belief systems extant during the time the Buddha lived were strictly mono-theistic, but poly-theistic. Hindus for example have some 300,000 gods. Considering the concept of a supreme being to be of any importance, particularly in the grand scheme of why human beings suffer and die.

Understanding the root meaning of a word, and its development, is highly beneficial in order to completely comprehend its use within context, particularly when comparing the use and meaning of ancient words to modern-day meaning.

<sup>145</sup> **Alara Kalama:** “After Siddhartha Gautama became an ascetic, he went to Alara Kalama, who was a teacher that taught a kind of early meditation at Vessali. Alara taught Siddhartha meditation, especially a dhyānic state called the “sphere of nothingness” (ākāṅkhaññāyatana). Gautama eventually equaled Alara, who could not teach him more, saying, “You are the same as I am now. There is no difference between us. Stay here and take my place and teach my students with me.” Gautama was not interested in staying. After leaving, the Siddhartha found a new teacher, Uddaka Ramaputta.” Src: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alara\\_Kalama](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alara_Kalama) | [https://www.dhammadownload.com/index.php?title=Alara\\_Kalama](https://www.dhammadownload.com/index.php?title=Alara_Kalama)

<sup>146</sup> **Uddaka Ramaputta:** “While Ālāra Kālāma accepted the Buddha as an equal and asked him to lead his community alongside him, Uddaka Rāmaputta acknowledged the Buddha as his superior and equal to his predecessor, Uddaka Rāma, who had actually attained the “sphere of neither perception nor non-perception” (nevasaññānāsaññāyatana), which Rāmaputta had not reached. Uddaka Rāmaputta asked the Buddha to take sole leadership of his students and community, but the Buddha preferred to travel on. Following his awakening, the Buddha first thought of Uddaka Rāmaputta as someone who would be able to understand and realize his dhamma, but later learned that Uddaka Rāmaputta had already died by that time. Despite this confidence, in other texts the Buddha disparaged Uddaka Rāmaputta as someone who claimed attainments and understanding without having achieved them for himself. Src: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uddaka\\_R%C4%81maputta](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uddaka_R%C4%81maputta) | [https://www.dhammadownload.com/index.php?title=Uddaka\\_Ramaputta](https://www.dhammadownload.com/index.php?title=Uddaka_Ramaputta)



Understanding the original meaning and origination of English words, there is a greater necessity to understand the meaning and contextual uses of Pali words. In many respects, Pali words have broad meanings that are not easily defined by modern language.

Many languages were spoken during the time of the Buddha. It is likely that he spoke several different languages. The language spoken by the people living in the Magadha region (modern-day Bihar, India), was a blend of Indo-Aryan languages similar to the ancient Vedic Sanskrit. Of all the languages that the Buddha could have used, including a form of Sanskrit Brahmana, he chose to teach in the vernacular language of the people in the area where he taught, so that average peoples could fully understand his teachings.

Now, with the case of the word religion; there is questionable background with regard to its origins. However, the ancient root of the word has a specific and traceable background. The word 'religion' has an interesting history beginning with the ancient Latin language of the earliest records of the Roman Empire. The basis for the English word 'religion,' is found in two ancient Latin words; '*ligare*,' 'to bind,' and '*religio*,' which during Imperial Roman times, meant, a sense of superstitious awe.

As it is with the Pali language of the Buddha's time, many ancient words, particularly those developed from tonal languages, do not have a single specific meaning. Probably the most prominent word in Pali is the word dukkha, which conveys a concept of "anything that causes a human to experience stress or dissatisfaction.

The Latin word *religio*, like the Pali word dukkha, conveys a larger concept rather than a single thought, meaning or definition, and takes on different connotations within the context of usage.

The Roman orator Cicero, used the word 'religare' (rell-ih-jee-aire-ay), to convey the concept "to assemble" or "to bind." Later the Roman writer Tertullian (around the 3rd century C.E.), used the Latin word "religare," which meant "to bind together."

However, aside from the specific words used to describe the word 'religio,' 'religare' or 'religare,' conceptually the word was used by the ancient Romans to convey the idea of persons who are brought together (bound together) under one belief system, but not specifically confined to a system of belief in gods or spiritual concepts<sup>147</sup>, this also included the Roman political system.



*Julian Imperial Temple*

Ancient Roman religion was tightly associated with Roman politics. Foundationally, the Roman political system relied heavily on the cult of the Caesars, as they were considered the representatives of the gods on Earth. Nearly every Roman Emperor had their own cult temple. When an Emperor in good standing died, they were deified by the Roman Senate.

<sup>147</sup> **Religare/Religare: Etymology:** "The Oxford Dictionary says, "The connection of the word religion with religare, to bind, has usually been favored by modern writers. This etymology, given by the Roman grammarian (end of 4<sup>th</sup>) cent. A. D.) Servius {Belligio, id est metus ab eo quod, mentem religet, dicta religio was supported by the Christian philosopher Lactantius (about 313 a. d.) who quotes the expression of the celebrated Roman philosophical poet Lucretius (c. 96 to 55 B. c.) : 2 religionum animum nodis exsolvere, in proof that he considered ligare, to bind, to be the root of religio. Cicero derives religio from relegere, as meaning to go through or over again in reading, speech or thought. Cicero says. Qui omnia quae ad cultum deorum pertinerent diligenter pertractarent, et tamquam relegerent, sunt dicti **religiosi** ex **relegendo**, ut elegantis ex eligendo." Src: **Etymology of Religion:** Journal of the American Oriental Society, Hoyt, Sara F. Vol. 32 | <https://archive.org/details/jstor-3087765/page/n1/mode/1up>

Since the time of Julius Caesar up to this day, the Holy Roman Empire of the Roman Catholic Church, and the Pontifex Maximus or the Pope, all bore the title of Pontifex Maximus<sup>148</sup> the same as does the Roman Catholic Pope does to this day.



Modern Pope Coin (Left) Emperor Vespasian Coin (Right)

Many who make the claim that Buddhism is a religion, rely on, not the words written in the Pali Tipitaka, but on modern-language sources such as dictionaries. However, only those definitions that support their arguments are used. Specifically noting that Buddhism is a non-monotheistic religion of Indian origin is a dichotomy. However, rather than supporting their claim, use of this phrase supports the fact that Buddhism is not a religion. s is a religion that recognizes a single god. Therefore, a “non” monotheistic religion is one that does not recognize any god. Use of this phrase is misleading; a misnomer, and contradictory to their own claim.

This is an example of what I refer to as “smooth labeling.” Furthermore, as was discussed earlier, claimants always find it necessary to point out that there was no word for ‘religion’ in the ancient Pali texts. Again, this is not entirely true. The Pali word *saddhamma*<sup>149</sup>, is used throughout the oldest Pali texts to distinguish true teachings from other belief systems [other religions]. *Saddhamma* refers to a system of truth. The root of the Pali word *saddhamma*, is *saddha*<sup>150</sup>; the transliteration of which means ‘belief.’ As was mentioned earlier, the Pali word *saddha* is commonly translated to mean ‘faith.’ Therefore, the concept of a religious-like system was recognized during the time of the Buddha. They may not have specifically used the Latin derived word “religion” but, isn’t this rather splitting hairs? *Saddhamma* extends the meaning of *saddha* (belief) to mean ‘the system’ or ‘a system’ of beliefs. In order for a person to have achieved *sotapanna*<sup>151</sup>, one must have confidence that the Buddha’s teachings are true.

However, and conveniently, claimants refer to the Oxford Dictionary’s definition of religion as any system of faith and worship. While perhaps half of that definition could be applied to Buddhism, namely faith, the element of worship does not exist as there is nothing and no one to worship. Since, as has already been discussed, the word “faith” applied to the Buddha’s teachings, do not have the same “religious” connotations as with the type of “faith” regarding the World’s religions.

<sup>148</sup> **Pontifex Maximus:** Src: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pontifex\\_maximus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pontifex_maximus) | <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/julius-caesar/pontifex-maximus/9594019A3278317C3945903E26476B09>

<sup>149</sup> **Saddhamma:** Pali: **सद्धम्म**; Def: “The true teachings; the true dhamma, the best belief, good practice, the doctrine of the good.” Src: [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali\\_query.py?qs=saddhamma&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?qs=saddhamma&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact)

<sup>150</sup> **Saddha:** Pali: **सद्धा** Def: “Believing; faith; felt to be [true].” Src: [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali\\_query.py?qs=saddha&matchtype=default](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?qs=saddha&matchtype=default)

<sup>151</sup> **Sota-apanna:** Pali: (Sota) **सोत** Def: “A hearer, a stream.” Pali: (Apanna) [As differentiated from pañña (पञ्जा)] **आपन्न** Def: “Gone down, entered.” Comb Def: “One who has gone down the Path, the stream; entered upon; 1. entered upon, fallen into, possessed of, having done. One who stands on the lowest step of the Path is called a sotāpanna. The classic definition of the stream-enterer is “one who has entered the supramundane path.” Supramundane is a fancy word for “transcending worldliness.” Src: <https://www.learnreligions.com/srotapanna-the-stream-enterer-4015169> | [https://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/study/into\\_the\\_stream.html#part2](https://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/study/into_the_stream.html#part2)

The Pali word *saddha* has an extended meaning, of which meaning cannot be correlated to the modern meaning of the word faith. Unlike the modern worldview definition of faith, *saddha* incorporates only those elements that are based on proof. The scope of meaning attributed to the word *saddha*, is that one “becomes” convinced by themselves of the Buddha’s teachings based on proof of reality, therefore gaining confidence in them.

Again, there is no ontological correlation of indiscernibleness, therefore *saddha* cannot be used as a correlate or for equating Buddhism as a religion in the world view meaning of faith of something unseen, unknown, and not understood. Alternately, claimants use the indisputable source of Wikipedia to support their claim that Buddhism is a religion by pigeonholing all of Buddhism into one giant generalization based on mere similarities rather than identicals or “sameness,” as the case would be upon an ontological indiscernibleness.

**Wikipedia:** “Religion is a social-cultural system of designated behaviors and practices, morals, worldviews, texts, sanctified places, prophecies, ethics, or organizations, that relates humanity to supernatural, transcendental, or spiritual elements.”<sup>152</sup>

However, conversely, the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the present meaning and use of the word ‘religion’ as;

*“The belief in a god or in a group of gods: an organized system of beliefs, ceremonies, and rules used to worship a god or a group of gods.”*<sup>153</sup>

Again, we see pre-selection, and hand-picking only those sources supporting these proposed claims. Rather than presenting multiple sources and wide-scope data, claimants are unlikely to use, for example, Merriam-Webster’s version of the definition of religion, cherry-picking definitions that supports their claim.

With regard to the absence of a supreme being or gods in general, Buddhism also does not fit the present worldview definition. From all the sources of reference the world has **ever** used regarding what elements constitute a religion, it is clear that certain elements must be present in order to qualify:

1. Worship of a god or goddess;
2. A philosophy, belief or doctrine that teaches followers to worship the god or goddess;
3. Specific behavior that directs the lives of followers.

The present accepted meaning of the word faith:

- Belief and trust in and loyalty to God;
- Belief in the traditional doctrines of a religion; Firm belief in something for which there is no proof;
- Complete trust;
- Something that is believed especially with strong conviction; especially a system of religious beliefs.

According to Christian ‘scriptures’ in the Book of Hebrews 11:1, the definition of faith is:

*“Faith is the assured expectation of what is hoped for, the evident demonstration of realities that are not seen.”*

The cornerstone of all of the world’s organizations considered to be religions, teach that faith is believing in something that can neither be seen nor proven. As with the case in the previous definition; faith asks one to believe something on the evident demonstration of realities that can never be seen. How is one able to have confidence in something that can never be seen or proven?

<sup>152</sup> Religion Definition: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion>

<sup>153</sup> Religion Definition: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/religion>

Regarding religious faith in a god, famed writer and philosopher **Ayn Rand** said:

*"If devotion to truth is the hallmark of morality, then there is no greater, nobler, more heroic form of devotion than the act of a man who assumes the responsibility of thinking. The alleged short-cut to knowledge, which is faith, is only a short-circuit destroying the mind. Qua [character of as] religion, no - in the sense of blind belief, belief unsupported by, or contrary to, the facts of reality and the conclusions of reason. Faith, as such, is extremely detrimental to human life: it is the negation of reason. They may have a good influence or proper principles to inculcate, but in a very contradictory context and, on a very - how should I say it? - dangerous or malevolent base: on the ground of faith.*

*Faith is the worst curse of mankind, as the exact antithesis and enemy of thought. To rest one's case on faith means to concede that reason is on the side of one's enemies- that one has no rational arguments to offer.<sup>154</sup>"*

It is only with regard to theistic-based religions that humans are required to believe in something that cannot be proven. One is right to be naturally skeptical of something that can never be proven or seen. Imagine someone trying to convince you to purchase a million-dollar home, without any proof whatsoever that the home exists. Most people would instantly intuit a con. Like all *con* games, there must be a *con*-fidence. Like millions of other people, during the years of my involvement with various Christian religions<sup>155</sup>, it was convenient to simply "have faith," rather than to "know faith" based on provable criteria. Unlike my experiences with the many diverse religions I participated in, to this day I have discovered that no matter how or how much I study the teachings of the Buddha, the intuition of the teachings being a con has never arisen.

So, again, given the meaning of the Pali word *saddha*; e.g. faith, based on or because of proof, we are presented with yet another ontological discernibleness; no sameness exists. The argument for the religiosity of Buddhism, with regard to faith, falls apart.

Faith, in the modern worldview definition, means that the follower does not have to take any responsibility for proving whether or not something believed in is actually true. Given the current worldview definition of faith, it certainly makes no sense why a person would need to examine or question their religion when the requirement of faith is necessary. Particularly since doing so is forbidden by theistic doctrine.

Is it not then apparent that all that is needed to maintain surety; some "assured expectation" of something that can never be proven, is the comprehensive foundation of unprovable belief? How very convenient for those theistic-based religions that conform to this tenet. Alternately, the Buddha taught against blind faith such as is evident with the current worldview of the meaning of faith.

### Purpose of Life

Behavioral scientists Reker and Wong<sup>156</sup> define personal meaning as the "*cognizance of order, coherence and purpose in one's existence, the pursuit and attainment of worthwhile goals, and an accompanying sense of fulfillment.*" Conversely, a Christian Catechism states: "*What is Man's main purpose?*" The answer is: "*Man's chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy Him forever.*"<sup>157</sup> Which definition of the purpose of life sounds closer to what the Buddha taught?

<sup>154</sup> **Rand, Ayn:** <https://www.learnreligions.com/ayn-rand-quotes-on-religion-and-reason-4003794>

<sup>155</sup> **Involvement with Christian Religions:** Holy Cross Seminary; Order of Saint Josephs; Our Lady of LaSalette; Chriseo Movement; Baptist; Assembly of God; Bethel AME; Episcopalian; Christ Scientist; Jehovah's Witnesses.

<sup>156</sup> **Meaning of Life:** Reker, G.T., & Wong, P.T.P. (1988). Aging as an individual process: Towards a theory of personal meaning. In J.E. Birren, & V.L. Bengston (Eds.), *Emergent theories of aging* (pp. 214–246). New York: Springer.

<sup>157</sup> **Christian Catechism:** [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meaning\\_of\\_life](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meaning_of_life)

The Buddha's teachings do not speak about "the meaning of life" or "the purpose of life," but about the potential of human life to end suffering, through embracing (understanding, not suppressing or denying) cravings and conceptual attachments, resulting in freedom and liberation from suffering and rebirth. Therefore, unlike the current world view, the Buddha teaches that psychological analysis results in understanding and awareness; insight that must come from the aspirant's direct experience, critical investigation, and reasoning rather than blind faith.

Those claiming that Buddhism is a religion almost always point to those entries in the Pali text where the Buddha used the word *saddha* (faith). As we have seen, this interpretation is incorrect. The Pali word translated to the word "faith" is the exact opposite of the present world view.

While the Buddha used the word *saddha* many times, he did so in the context of direct experiences that a follower could prove for themselves. This context yet widens the gap of the kind of faith that the world view attributes to the meaning of the word religion. None of the World religions have a word that is of the same context as that of *saddha*. So, lumping Buddhist faith with the world view of faith is absolutely incorrect. Ontologically then, here is yet another discernable difference, meaning there is no sameness in order to be a valid comparison.

### Core Differences of Buddhism

Following are the major ways that the teachings of the Buddha differ from the World's religions. These are:

1. Tantamount, is that there is no supreme being or God that hands out rewards and punishments nor demands singular worship.
2. Buddha's teachings are not the foundations for a religion, the same as in the world-view meaning. Buddha did not teach Buddhism. The concept of a religious system named after the Buddha, did not exist during the first two thousand years. There is no doctrine of "faith" in the Buddha's teachings, in the context of having faith toward an unseen, unprovable, supernatural being.
3. Unlike the World's religions, the Buddha teaches that the ultimate objective of students/practitioners is awakening and/or liberation from Samsara, rather than deliverance from and forgiveness of one's sins.
4. No person who has attained self-awakening and become a buddha is a savior, saving others through god-like power. A student of the Buddha's teachings seeks refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, with the example of the Buddha as the incomparable teacher.
5. No implication exists that the Buddha is anything more than a teacher. A follower's relationship with the Buddha's teachings is strictly that of a teacher and student.
6. Buddha's teachings place heavy emphasis on a follower's own self-reliance, self-discipline and individual effort. No call for blind faith.
7. Dhamma is universal and is not specifically rooted in the teachings of the Buddha. Therefore, the Buddha's teachings show that he is not the sole creator of these universal truths, but that he is merely the one who has direct experience with these truths.
8. Hell, as a place of eternal punishment and damnation, as is taught by the Sky-God/Creator religions, is non-existent in the Buddha's teachings. Buddha taught that Hell is merely one of six realms of samsara (the cycle of birth and death).
9. Unlike the World's Sky-God religions, the Buddha's teaching has no concept of sin. Each individual is responsible for their own actions, thus the reason for the teaching of kamma (karma).

10. Followers of the Sky God religions cannot possess the same nature as their God. Only God is omniscient, all loving, all-powerful, and pure. Buddha teaches that all sentient beings have a buddha nature (mental state of being). One can become a buddha (an enlightened being) with diligent practice, attaining a non-delusional state where mental afflictions and suffering are eradicated.
11. The theistic Sky God religions have no answer to the fate or inequality of humankind. However, the Buddha's teachings of kamma; a universal law of cause and effect, clearly explain both the fate and inequality of humankind, because of the ever-present link between humankind's actions and consequences of those actions.
12. Such things as War and Capital Punishment, which most, if not all, theistic Sky God religions support, is forbidden in the teachings of the Buddha. Rather, the Buddha places the highest value on compassion for all living things, including animals.
13. While the World's religions focus on being good and doing good, the Buddha's teachings transcend these things, going beyond doing good and being good. The Buddha taught that attachment to good deeds; the concept of doing good or being good, is just another form of attachment and craving, which is the entire cause of samsara.
14. There exists no tenet for killing someone for breaking a moral precept. Therefore, there is no concept of killing another person in the name of religion or any other worldly reason.
15. "In the beginning..." is a concept that does not exist within the teachings of the Buddha. There is no teaching that makes mention of a beginning or an end with regard to one's existence. In other words, unlike theistic Sky God religions, there is no "first cause," questioning how human existence came to be.
16. Having gained a self-awakened state, known as enlightenment, the Buddha earned a mental state of clarity; all-knowing, through his own efforts. However, he is not invincible, almighty or omniscient; Buddha neither created life nor any part of the Universe.
17. Many religions of the World teach a form of meditation, some in the form of repetitive prayers. Most, if not all, seek an audience of some kind with the Sky God for the purpose of supplication or a request for forgiveness of one's wrongdoings. Buddha did not create the practice of meditation. However, the Buddha emphasized the importance of single-minded meditation practice in order to achieve correct knowledge, and insight into one's own existence. Thus, meditation is a critical tool for the purposes of self-awakening.
18. Among the many things that are unique to the Buddha's teachings, is the teaching of emptiness, in that there is an impermanent nature to all realities.
19. The never-ending cycle of rebirth and death (samsara) is the most fundamental teaching of the Buddha. This teaching defines the cause of humankind's existence as perpetual cycles due to ignorance and kamma. This cycle only ends when a sentient being attains release through self-awakening (Nibbana/Nirvana), which is 'blowing out' of the flame of kamma, defilements, and delusions. All theistic Sky God religions teach that there is but one realm of release, which is heaven.



### If It Must Be – Then let there be equanimity.

If the teachings of the Buddha must be included with the world-view meaning of religion, then by necessity, rather than based on faith, the Buddha's teachings are a *boni-fide* system of analysis and reasoning.

This separation or division did not change or alter the Buddha's teachings in any way. What changed was the way in which the Buddha's teachings were represented. Only three schools remain to this day, the Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana.

Not long after the Buddha's death, a division occurred over disagreements that arose due to the meaning and differences between a Bodhisatta and an Arahant. To this day, Theravada is the only school that continues with a focus on discovering and preserving the original teachings of the Buddha, but does so in the original manner of employing self-analysis as the means to achieve self-awakening.

Originally, the Buddha's teachings were referred to as *vibhajjavāda* (vib-haj-jah-vah-dah). This is a Pali concatenated word. *Vibhajja* is translated as 'analysis' or 'detailing,' and *vada* means 'doctrine' or 'viewpoint.' Therefore, the entire word *Vibhajjavada* is talking about a viewpoint built from analysis. This word describes the teaching of the Buddha perfectly, for the efficacy of the teachings are indeed based on the analysis of the individual.

### Attachment to Concepts

In Buddha's teaching about the "raft," he used the analogy that if you build a raft for the purpose of getting to the other side of a river, after arriving, what would be the purpose of carrying the raft around with you for the rest of your life? Discard the raft. It is no longer needed. With this analogy the Buddha was saying that once you learn certain things and have accomplished the goal, you no longer need the teaching.

In his book (*Appendix I, pp. 177-182*), Bhante Punjabi discusses verse 254 of the Dhammapada. In most translations, this verse is rendered as follows:

*"All beings take delight in fetters (i.e., craving, pride and wrong view) that prolong samsara; all the Buddhas are free from these fetters."*

Bhante Punjabi renders this verse as follows:

*"...ordinary people are fond of speculating, theorizing, asking questions and answering them, seeking knowledge as concepts, and modifying them."*

In his commentary regarding the meaning of this text, Bhante Punjabi states:

*"The Buddha's awakening was not the grasping of a **concept** and announcing, 'I discovered the truth.' Buddha emptied his mind of all **concepts**, including knowledge, and stilled his mind, which was the perfect serenity of mind that could not be disturbed or agitated again. To achieve that state, he gave up **concepts** and dependence on **concepts**...there was a complete inner transformation. That is what Awakening means."*

*"All that we know are concepts. The Buddha pointed out that there is no reality other than concepts. The only reality is the concept. And this is something people don't like to accept. He says that if there is any person who claims there is a reality other than concepts, he can be questioned and cross-questioned, and ultimately, he won't be able to make good his boast (Samyutta Nikaya 35.23). The Buddha appoints out that concepts are the things that create our problems. Concepts are not present as just concepts; they turn into emotions. All the problems in the world are the result of concepts."*

I agree with Bhante Punjabi's comments regarding "concepts." An inexhaustible problem that has existed in the World, if not "the" most inexhaustible problem, has been that of the concept of religion. Wars, death, destruction, impediments to knowledge, and ignorance about the human experience, have resulted because of the differences in the concept of "religion."

It is human attachment to concepts that creates all the problems of the World. In a lecture conducted in New York, presented by CFI-Metro New York and cosponsored by the New York Society for Ethical Culture<sup>158</sup>, author and neuroscientist, Sam Harris stated:

*“There’s a taboo here that has already begun casting a shadow over our conversation, and I want to make it explicit before violating it. It is taboo in our society (not considered ethically proper) to criticize a person’s religious faith. It’s taboo even to notice the differences among our religions. It’s taboo, for instance, to even notice that certain religions lead to violence in a way that others don’t. Certain religious doctrines promulgate violence.”*

Harris is talking about religious doctrine, and religious doctrines are concepts. And it is, as Bhante Punjabi says: *“Clinging to concepts will perpetuate the emotions...Awakening is letting go of concepts, not grasping another concept, and saying this is true and everything else is false (P.179).”* So, the problem with Buddha-ism is not about truth and falsehood. The Buddha focused exclusively on how suffering arises, and how it ends. As Bhante Punjabi states:

*“The discovery of this problem and its solution is called Awakening. Normally, we are asleep because we take these concepts as reality, and we have closed our minds to other things (p.180).”*

Is not the Bhante saying that for a student of the Buddha to cling to the concept of “religion” as a thing, prevents awakening? Awakening is only real if there is no clinging. It is the “giving up of,” rather than “holding onto” concepts when awakening is discovered. Awakening is to give up the normal reality. Is then the “normal reality” not exactly what we consensually accept as “religion” that Bhante Punjabi was talking about when he commented on verse 254 of the Dhammapada?

Further in his commentary, Bhante Punjabi states that it is concepts that are the creator, that the whole world is created in the mind (p.181).

Buddha’s analogy of the Elephant and the blind men. Each blind man touched a different part of an elephant, and each one developed a mental image of an elephant. While their individual experiences were true; an experience which was isolated and confined by the part of the elephant that they touched. Their concepts of what an elephant was differed tremendously. Arguments and quarrelling ensued whereby they ended up fighting one another. Is this not the same result of grasping onto different concepts of religion?

Bhante Punjabi states:

*“The point of this story is that the unilateral view of experience not only limits one’s vision it **also creates conflict and undermines love and understanding**, and therefore, defeats the very purpose of religion.”*

### The Religion Marketplace: Commodification of the Buddha’s Teachings

One of the most unwholesome and salacious effects of the Westernization of the Buddha’s teachings is known as McMindfulness.



<sup>158</sup> “The End of Faith” Harris, Sam, *Lecture Src*: <https://youtu.be/sQuDWt9qmBs>

Organizations, including those claiming to be “Buddhist,” have corrupted the Buddha’s teaching of mindfulness, offering mindfulness instruction for the purpose of promoting efficiency and production instead of self-awakening or enlightenment, which also reinforces the Western ethic of profit-over-people.

This “McMindfulness” industry has profited to the tidy sum of over \$200 billion. There are even “mindfulness” apps where one can purchase subscriptions accessible through a cell phone. The two biggest meditation apps, Headspace and Calm, each make more than \$50 million in revenue each year through their guided meditation subscription services<sup>159</sup>. Such methods, absent of the knowledge gained through the Four Noble Truths, leads to nothing and nowhere, outside of perhaps purchasing a moment of relaxation.

Bhikkhu Bodhi, and American monk of the Theravada school, states that;

*“Absent a sharp social critique, Buddhist practices could easily be used to justify and stabilize the status quo, becoming a reinforcement of consumer capitalism.”*

A plethora of books, magazine articles, Internet blogs and talk-shows, are offered around the world, peddling mindfulness as a cure-all solution for the everyday problems of human beings<sup>160</sup>. This, it would seem, reinforces Bhikkhu Bodhi’s prediction.

*“Gurus talk about ‘the competitive advantage of meditation.’ Pupils come to see it as a way to get ahead in life. And the point of the whole exercise is lost. What has parading around in pricey Lululemon outfits got to do with the Buddhist ethic of non-attachment to material goods? And what has staring at a computer-generated dot got to do with the ancient art of meditation? Western capitalism seems to be doing rather more to change eastern religion than eastern religion is doing to change Western capitalism.”<sup>161</sup>*

## Conclusion

That the Buddha’s teachings were originally based on an analysis of his own being, clearly defines the emphasis of his teachings. Applying this Pali word (*vibhajjavada*<sup>162</sup>) to the Buddha’s teachings, was not merely specific, but intentional. No religion, in the context of the current world-view meaning, employs this class or type of analytical specificity.

Sam Harris<sup>163</sup>, an American author, philosopher, and neuroscientist, posits that to paste the label of religion onto the Buddha’s teachings is not only detrimental, but destructive. In his eye-opening work, titled “The End of Faith,” Harris states this clearly:

*“Kill the Buddha,” says the old kaon. “Kill Buddhism,” says Sam Harris, who argues that Buddhism’s philosophy, insight, and practices would benefit more people if they were not presented as a religion. The ninth-century Buddhist master Lin Chi is supposed to have said, “If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him.”*

<sup>159</sup> **McMindfulness:** Src: <https://medium.com/@marcodpatricio/how-mindfulness-became-a-billion-dollar-industry-61acb50fd436>

<sup>160</sup> **Mindful America:** Src: <https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199827817.001.0001/acprof-9780199827817>

<sup>161</sup> **Mindfulness Business:** Src: <https://www.economist.com/business/2013/11/16/the-mindfulness-business>

<sup>162</sup> Vibhajja-vada: Pali: विभज्ज (vibhajja) वाद (vada) “Defs: (Vibajjha: “Having divided or analyzed; dividing, analyzing, detailing; in detail “vāda the Vibhajja doctrine, i.e. the doctrine which analyses.”) (Vada: “Doctrine: dhamma; dīṭṭhi; vāda true doctrine: sammādiṭṭhi: theory, the science of disputation; in meaning of theory, disputation; speak: say; [vāda as has developed quite distinctly the specified meaning of an emphatic or formulated speech= assertion or doctrine] 1) Srcs: [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali\\_query.py?qs=vibhajja&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?qs=vibhajja&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact) | [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali\\_query.py?qs=vada&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/pali_query.py?qs=vada&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact)

<sup>163</sup> **Sam Harris bio:** [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sam\\_Harris](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sam_Harris)

*Like much of Zen teaching, this seems too cute by half, but it makes a valuable point: **to turn the Buddha into a religious fetish is to miss the essence of what he taught**. In considering what Buddhism can offer the world in the twenty-first century, I propose that we take Lin Chi's admonishment rather seriously. As students of the Buddha, we should dispense with Buddhism."*

To infer that the teachings of the Buddha are a religion, modern-day people attach the suffix "ism." However, as Harris states, this conveys false concepts and ideas of the Buddha's teachings.

*"So, insofar as we maintain a discourse as 'Buddhists,' we ensure that the wisdom of the Buddha will do little to inform the development of civilization in the twenty-first century."*

It is the uniqueness of the Buddha's teachings that allow an individual the opportunity to follow them, to such a degree, whereby they could become a genuine Buddha. This is only possible because of the tenet of *vibhajjavada*, meaning that whatever a practitioner believes, does so with sufficient evidence based on analysis. This cannot be claimed by any of the teachings of theistic faith-based religions. As Harris states, the teachings of the Buddha are very much like science:

*"One starts with the hypothesis that using attention in the prescribed way (meditation), and engaging in or avoiding certain behaviors (ethics), will bear the promised result (wisdom and psychological well-being). **This spirit of empiricism (observation) animates Buddhism to a unique degree.** For this reason, the methodology of Buddhism, if shorn of its religious encumbrances, could be one of our greatest resources as we struggle to develop our scientific understanding of human subjectivity."*

Buddha's teachings are uniquely non-religious, and a label, such as "contemplative science," rightly describes the methodology ascribed by the Buddha, which reveals not only truths about the nature of the mind and consciousness, but the emptiness and impermanence of the phenomenal world. These teachings are unique to the degree that they clearly stand apart from any of the doctrines or dogmas of the World's religions.

So, categorizing the teachings of the Buddha as religion, destroys its uniqueness, and confuses people, particularly in the West. This weakens the importance of meditation, relegating it to mere ritual. Additionally, the label "religion" transmits with it a common distrust, which, I believe, the historical record of the World's religions shows that they have rightly earned.

Once a contemplative path on the Dhamma is fixed, there comes a realization of just how unique the Buddha's teachings are. A follower who has adopted the concept of *vibhajjavada*; (a path from the viewpoint of analysis), they realize how utterly unlike the teachings of the Buddha are, compared to World religions. However, as Harris states:

*"When Buddhism becomes completely integrated with the concept that it is just another religion, then Buddhist meditation will become synonymous with a failure to assimilate the changes that have occurred in our understanding of the human mind."*

In order for the teachings of the Buddha to remain unique, offering genuine truths about the mind and the phenomenal world; I posit that truths such as emptiness, selflessness, and impermanence, must be uncontaminated by the word "religion," and religious dogmatism, which is the "ism," defining the World's religions.

Therefore, the Buddha's teachings cannot be trapped, boxed-in and limited by the dogmatic concepts of Buddha-ism. Buddha's teachings, taken as a whole, represents the richest source of contemplative wisdom that any civilization has ever produced. As Sam Harris states:

*"In a world that has long been terrorized by fratricidal Sky-God religions, the ascendance of Buddhism would surely be a welcome development. But this will not happen. There is no reason whatsoever to think that Buddhism can successfully compete with the relentless evangelizing of Christianity and Islam. Nor should it try to."*

Commercialization and secularization of the teachings of the Buddha place them at great risk of misappropriation as merely a “feel-good” philosophy, like TM (Transcendental Meditation) was in the late 1970s<sup>164</sup>. One of the more notable products of the World’s religions is their propensity for developing a kind of spiritual apathy. Thus, categorizing the teachings of the Buddha as “religion,” causes them to produce nothing more unique than the same that is expected from the World’s religions. Mixing the concepts of “religion,” regardless of how intensely such things directly contradict the Buddha’s teachings, the Buddha’s wisdom and knowledge are at risk of becoming “just another religion.”

New-Age neopagan groups taking an interest in some of the Buddha’s teachings, go as far as identifying themselves as Buddhist-Christians or Buddhist-Hindus. This is a glaring misunderstanding or lack of knowledge of the teachings of the Buddha. Integrating the teachings of the Buddha for the sake of “a Buddhism,” causes heinous damage to the message of the Buddha, and waters-down the benefits of practicing those teachings. The very fact that the teachings of the Buddha are non-dogmatic is evidence sufficient enough to consider that his teachings are unique and separate from those of the World’s religions. However, need I point out that it is those who are Buddhists themselves, that create the dogmatism of *Buddha-ism*.

I fear that the teachings of the Buddha may become reduced to a dogmatic “*Buddha-ism*,” unrecognizable from “religion.” Benefits of the Eightfold Noble Path; replaced with the rote, meaningless “spiritual” habits of the “religious” kind. A disregard for the purpose of the teachings, people become warmed to the idea that meditation is *Buddha-ism*, and that the comforting aspects of it are all that matter. Producing, over time, a population of “Buddhists” who are detached from the entire purpose of the Four Noble Truths.

This secularization of the teachings of the Buddha, for whatever the reason, does hold a potential danger of limiting people’s ability to reach the maximum purpose of happiness prescribed by the Buddha.

Combining or melding the Buddha’s teachings into a dogmatic “*Buddha-ism*,” for the sake of labeling ease with the word “religion,” has a great potential for causing the teachings to become mundane. Such mundanity and commonplaceness are evident in the case of isolating the Buddha’s teachings of mindfulness for corporate purposes.

The word “Buddhism” or any equivalent thereof, is not found in any of the original Pali texts. In fact, the Buddha explicitly rejected phrasings like “Buddhism” which imply a doctrine, theory, system, or practice having a distinctive character or relation: chiefly used in disparagement: as, this is the age of isms; to set up an ism or a philosophical stance or position or viewpoint. He emphasized that he was not merely expounding his own concepts (viewpoints), but rather he was providing instructions toward a Path that he himself experienced. This Path outlines, very completely, how life ought to be lived, which would lead one to a self-awakened state of beingness.

This Path, as taught by the Buddha, inevitably leads to the cessation of suffering, but only through a lifetime of effort to gain insight into essential truths about one’s own human condition. This path, this Dhamma, is uniquely codified in Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Noble Path and the twelve-fold chain of dependent origination.

Ultimately, the goal of following such a Path, culminates in one’s release from ignorance. Such release derives by the rejection of clinging, particularly to things such as concepts. Relinquishment depends on the dissolution of the idea of permanence.

<sup>164</sup> **Transcendental Meditation Movement:** Src: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transcendental\\_Meditation\\_movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transcendental_Meditation_movement)

Meditation is the basis and foundation for beginning on this Path. Following the Path laid out in the Buddha Dhamma catalyzes one's personal experience of reality through the knowledge that everything we are, see, think, and feel, changes; is impermanent and impersonal.

It is through the Path of Dhamma that one is able to transcend hate, fear, delusion, "*isms*," concepts and viewpoints. The final realization of the Path of Dhamma is freedom from ignorance; ignorance that perpetuates the cycle of rebirth, suffering, and death.

Buddha's teachings have survived intact across millennia because they touch common human hope, but not just unfounded hope, blind faith or wishful thinking, nor of hope that rests on the existence of a Sky God or saints, but a specific hope of freedom from suffering caused by one's own ignorance. His teachings are proven to be effective at providing a solution for the problem of human existence. In the end, would it not then be beneficial; would it not be efficacious, to completely drop the concept of "religion" or "not-religion," from any discussion regarding the teachings of the Buddha?

Personally, I believe that when asked whether or not Buddha-*ism*, Buddhism or the teachings of the Buddha are a religion, one's reply should mirror the manner that the Buddha responded when he was asked to answer such existential questions as whether or not the Universe was infinite. Did he not simply answer that to know such things was inconsequential to the solution of the problem of human existence? Is it not just as inconsequential to one's awakening whether or not Buddhism is a religion? What's the point? What purpose does it serve? What is the intention behind the question itself? Doesn't the question itself imply or infer attachment to a concept, to a viewpoint? In the way in which the Buddha answered certain esoteric questions, it should be left up to the individual to decide whether or not the teachings constitute "religion."

In responding as the Buddha did, I have complete confidence that when a person correctly understands the teachings, and experiences their intended effect; using their own powers of analysis, they will naturally understand that neither the Buddha's teachings or Buddhism is a religion.

My question is why this propensity to align Buddha-*ism* with religion even exists? It is more than a curiosity that "religion" in Europe, and in particular Sweden, that only ten percent of society there adheres to or even participates in any religion at all. While religion is on the decline in Europe, why is this fact the opposite situation in the United States?

I believe that when a government, such as the United States, adheres to a State sanctioned religion; is aligned with religious concepts such as "In God We Trust," this creates a religion marketplace. The tax laws of the United States reflect this by non-taxation of religious organizations. Competition is created amongst religious denominations for a bigger piece of that economic pie. This, in turn, creates a kind of religion bionetwork that supports the philosophy of the State religion. Inhabitants of the society are expected to abide by the philosophy of the government; which includes upholding the philosophy of the State's concept of religion.

In the case with the United States, that concept is that of being a Christian nation. If there is any doubt that this is true, consider that every person in the United States accepts the State's currency, which is stamped with the words "In God We Trust." Additionally, several lines in a well-known State hymn, "America the Beautiful" are:

*"America, America, God shed his grace on thee...America, America, God mend thine every flaw...America, America, May God, thy gold refine...America, America, God shed his grace on thee"*



In the United States, that the State religion is “any religion,” is a part of the very fiber of its Democratic Constitutional doctrine. In the United States, freedom of religion is a constitutionally protected right provided in the religion clauses of the First Amendment<sup>165</sup>. Therefore, “religion,” in this specific instance, is an accepted part of the social mind of the inhabitants of the State. It then stands to reason that adherents to the concept that Buddha-ism is religion, feel comfortable with this ideation. So, why *not* hang your shingle out with the rest of them, and join the marketplace competition?

Buddhists, even Western monks and nuns, that agree with the concept that Buddha-ism is a religion, are an integral part of the social mind of people living in the United States. Therefore, the claim that Buddha-ism is religion is not the result of epistemology (the study of knowledge). Rather, it is a claim that is based on the State’s naturalization of religion as an element of the governmental policy and philosophy that is integrated into the political doctrine of the country.

Among Buddhists, like the Buddha himself, all we have at our disposal is dialog. Any truthful dialog...look, if what is being talked about is truth, what does the label “religion” have to do with anything? Neither religion nor religious dogma has any kind of unwritten corner on the truth market.

As was said by Sam Harris:

*“To turn the Buddha into a religious fetish is to miss the essence of what he taught. In considering what Buddhism can offer the world in the twenty-first century, I propose that we take Lin Chi’s admonishment rather seriously. As students of the Buddha, we should dispense with Buddhism.”*

So, rather than being like; “the ordinary people that are fond of speculating, theorizing, asking questions and answering them, seeking knowledge as concepts, and modifying them to fit their own purposes and beliefs,” the person who grasps the Buddha’s teachings might do well to recall Bhante Punnaaji’s words:

*“Buddha emptied his mind of all concepts, including knowledge, and stilled his mind, which was the perfect serenity of mind that could not be disturbed or agitated again. To achieve that state, he gave up concepts and dependence on concepts...there was a complete inner transformation. That is what Awakening means.”*

So, do what helps others. Refrain from harming others. Transcend your own ignorance, clinging, hate, fear and delusion. This and only this, is the dispensation of all of the Buddhas. For those, who are perhaps more advanced in the steps toward awakening; for those who have cast away the raft; for those who have given up concepts and dependency on concepts, who are closer to complete transformation, this entire paper, utterly, is of no use.

<sup>165</sup> Freedom of Religion in the United States: Src: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom\\_of\\_religion\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_of_religion_in_the_United_States)

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